



THE DEVIL'S DIE.

A NOVEL.

BY GRANT ALLEN,

Author of "Babylon," "The Duchess of Powysland," Etc.

NEW YORK:
THE F. M. LUPTON PUBLISHING COMPANY,
Nos. 72-76 WALKER STREET.

4004
A2D4

290012

THE DEVIL'S DIE.

CHAPTER I.

"Now then, Sam," the head porter muttered sulkily in an undertone to his mate; "lend a hand here, will you, lazy, to get out the black gentleman's luggage."

Dr. Mohammad Ali stood watching the porters very attentively as they disembarked the bags and boxes (with the regulation show of unnecessary vehemence) from the open van at Polperran Station on the tag-end of the Great Western Railway.

Carlyle was right: immense and unsuspected depths of importance lurk unseen in mere clothing. At Saharanpur, in the North-West Provinces, where Mohammad Ali had been born and bred, and where his respected father still lived upon his means as a native money-lender, the young doctor would have passed in the crowd as a very decent Mohammedan gentleman of the stereotyped pattern. A turban and a cummerbund make all the difference. But at Polperran Station, in the county of Cornwall, a round felt hat of the newest model, a well-made cut-away tourist suit of grey homespun, a tie and collar of Bond Street perfection, and a white rosebud daintily stuck, with a sprig of maiden-hair, in his topmost buttonhole, had almost transformed the handsome young Mussulman into a genuine free-born, first-class passenger. As he stood there, holding out a tiny scrap of official paper in his small and neatly gloved right hand, his own mother, good lady, mewed up in her zenana at Saharanpur, would hardly have recognized her metamorphosed son for a true and faithful follower of the Prophet of Islam.

Dr. Mohammad Ali was decidedly both good-looking and gentlemanly. Dark, of course; you expect a man whose parents live in the native town at Saharanpur to have a somewhat sombre cast of complexion; but strikingly handsome and pleasing, for all that, with his keen and piercing East Indian eyes, his delicately-moulded small features, his charming smile of perfect good-humour, and his two even rows of dainty and faultless pearl-white teeth. Even the porters eyed him respectfully; they saw at a glance with professional instinct that he was black, but comely—one of the right sort in fact; good for half-a-crown down any day, if he was good for a penny.

"Genelman's got a dog-ticket, Sam," the head porter muttered, with a nudge to his underling.

"It's not a dog, my friend," Dr. Mohammad Ali answered, smiling.

in English a great deal better than the porter's own. It's that box over yonder—the one with the pierced holes and the stick-out handles to it. Take it gently by the handles only, and don't put your fingers too near the holes on any account. There's a snake inside it ; in fact, a rattlesnake, one of the very deadliest creatures known to science."

The young man spoke in a soft, low, musical voice, and didn't seem to be at all aware that he was communicating a fact in the least out of the common ; but the effect of his speech upon the two burly Cornish porters was instantaneous and magical. They had been preparing to swing out the box, live stock and all, with the usual generous and effusive recklessness of the suborned luggage-smasher ; but at the sound of that talismanic name, "rattlesnake," they laid down the handles gingerly with profound firmness, and respectfully, but very distinctly declined to proceed further with the act of clearing the entire compartment. "The company are not and don't undertake to be common carriers of rattlesnakes, sir," the head porter observed abstractedly ; "and, what's more, at my time of life, it ain't to be expected as I'm going to take to 'em."

At that very moment the sudden apparition of a rapidly vibrating forked tongue, protruded like lightning through one of the drilled holes in the box, and showing an ominous vista behind of two grooved fangs, surmounted by a pair of watchful beady-black eyes in the dim background, gave added point and fresh emphasis to the head porter's decided protest.

Dr. Mohammad Ali observed the apparition of the tongue and fangs with evident relish. "Ha ! that's right, old girl," he said, tapping the cover gently with his gloved finger, "so you're lively, are you ? lively, lively ! None the worse for your long journey down from Paddington, eh, my beauty ? That's a good girl ! Softly, softly ! Put back your head now, and go to sleep again. You shall rest in peace to-night in your furnished apartments, your own hired house, my lady. Do you happen to know where a gentleman by the name of Dr. Chichele lodges ? Ah, there you are at last, my dear fellow ! Delighted to see you. I've brought down the Begum as you see, for your behoof and instruction ; but your porters here in this remote district appear to harbour an incomprehensible prejudice against venomous reptiles. They seem to be afraid the Begum 'll bite them. Lend me a hand with her highness, will you, Harry, and mind she doesn't get a chance with her fangs at you for all the universe ?"

The young Englishman in boating flannels who had just come up, took one of the handles firmly in his grasp, while Mohammad himself held the other daintily in his gloved fingers. Between them they lifted the box with gentle caution out of the luggage van, and laid it down on the platform safely in front of them.

"Now, then !" shouted the station-master, with some asperity ; "look alive, there, will you ! Any more for the Penzance train ? Got that vermin safe out of the van ? All right ! Go ahead, then, Bill !" And he sounded his whistle. "And you, sir," turning to the smiling East Indian, "you can't take that beast back to London again, you

know. The Great Western Railway Company hereby give notice that they are not and will not be——"

"I know, I know," Mohammad Ali answered, with a good-natured smile and wave of his hand. "But the Begum doesn't propose going back to town at all, Mr. Station-master. It's her highness's intention, as at present advised, to spend the short remainder of her days in observing nature here at Polperran. She's in splendid poison, Harry; in magnificent poison. I never saw a rattlesnake in finer fig anywhere in India. Rich and rare were the germs she wore—every germ of them all a deadly virus. If she was to bite you this moment—hi presto, before you could say the usual 'Jack Robinson' it'd be all up with you." And he seated himself carelessly sideways upon the box, drew off his glove, and tapped at one of the round holes with his thumb and forefinger, as if on purpose to excite and stimulate the half-dormant creature coiled up inside.

The Begum answered by darting her tongue out viciously as he withdrew his finger, and endeavouring to bury her fangs deep in the naked flesh of her ardent admirer.

"Naughty girl, naughty girl, be quiet now, will you?" the young Mussulman murmured playfully, in the voice in which one usually addresses a toy terrier. "Would she bite her master, then, would she; would she? She was a naughty, ungrateful, wicked, bad serpent, and she deserved to be taken straight home, and well whipped, and sent to bed supperless. How shall we get her up to your lodging, Harry?"

"There's a sort of cab or omnibus somewhere in the place," the Englishman answered, laughing; "but the 'busman will certainly decline to carry her, so we'd better borrow a truck and wheel it up with her. But you can't go along through the streets of Polperran wheeling a truck in that hat, and coat, and buttonhole, Ali. You look for all the world, with your fine clothes, as if you were going to a fête or a flower show."

Ali lighted a cigarette carelessly, "When I come into a fresh world," he said, puffing it out in white clouds, "I dress myself in my best accordingly. I have come to explore the world of Cornwall. There will be houris in Polperran. Even the despised black man likes to do himself justice in the presence of houris. Am I not a man and a brother?" And he looked up into his English companion's fair face with a comical expression of appealing humanity which made Harry Chichele laugh heartily.

"Well," the Englishman said, "at any rate, Ali, we'd better take the beast up—I beg your pardon, I mean the Begum. By the way, why do you call her such an odd name? She's handsome enough and vicious enough for it in all conscience, anyhow."

Ali helped him lift the box tenderly on to the trolley which the porter lent him. "She is," he said, removing his cigarette from his mouth for a moment, "wicked enough, and vicious enough, no doubt, or at least nearly. For she couldn't quite come up in wickedness and cruelty to the amiable old lady after whom I've ventured to call her."

"And who was that?" Harry Chichele asked carelessly, as they wheeled the truck between them away from the station.

"Oh, it's only a strange weird story of our own parts, but you'd better hear it, both because you're going in future to be the Begum's master, and because—well, because the Begum's story is somehow connected with certain English families of some social and domestic importance. I called her after Begum Johanna of Deoband."

"And who was Begum Johanna?" Harry Chichele asked, with that faint show of interest which we all feebly pretend to feel in things Indian before the faces of those to whom they are living realities. "I seem to remember the name, I fancy. My father often spoke of her, I think. Perhaps he had something to do with her in India."

Mohammad Ali coughed. It was a dry cough with a peculiarly arid and Arab significance about it. "He had," he answered. "Your grandfather knew her. She was the wife of a French soldier of fortune in the wild freebooting days in the Punjaub. And it's about her they tell that terrible story of the buried slave-girl. Of course you know the story of the slave-girl!"

"We English are dreadfully ignorant of Indian affairs," Harry Chichele replied with obliquely apologetic confession of ignorance.

"Well, this is the story, and you ought to know it, Harry. It—it has some interest for some of the great Anglo-Indian families. Begum Johanna had once a beautiful slave girl whom she suspected of having intrigued with her husband, the Frenchman. Whether she had intrigued with him, or whether she hadn't I can't tell you; but at any rate she was a very lovely girl from Cashmere, and the Frenchman admired her, and that alone was quite enough to rouse Begum Johanna's deadliest jealousy. So one night, when she imagined her husband had been talking with the girl, she got her bricklayers suddenly to excavate a great hole under her own bedchamber, and built a small brick vault, and put a trap door to it leading from her bedroom. Then she had the girl brought before her and flogged till she was almost insensible; and after that, a couple of servants lowered the poor creature down into the vault, with a jar of water but no food, and closed the trap door down tight, and put Begum Johanna's bed on the top of it. For nine days and nine nights that unhappy slave lay there, starving and dying slowly in the vault; and for nine days and nine nights Begum Johanna lay on her couch listening to the terrified creature's frantic shrieks, and gloating over her agony as they subsided at last till she died by inches. Harry, it's a terrible thing even to feel one belongs to a race in which such devilry as that was ever possible."

He said it earnestly and very sadly, as if the feeling of his kinship with that awful woman oppressed and weighed down his inmost spirit. Harry Chichele instinctively felt the genuineness of his black friend's expression, and answered hurriedly, as if to put him more at his ease, "Well, you know, after all, we ourselves, Ali, here in Europe, aren't so very much better either. It's not so very long ago, when one comes to think of it, that we, too, burnt and tortured our witches and our criminals; and I can remember myself the time when Lord Tom

Noddy, and others of his caste, made parties of pleasure and hired rooms at vast expense to go and see a man die in his boots."

"Ah, yes," the Indian answered, with a faint toss of his head and a curl of his lip, "that's true enough, of course, my dear fellow; we're both in pretty much the same box. There's a great deal of human nature in all of us. The ape and tiger are only half bred out of us anywhere as yet. But the awful fact remains none the less awful because we all of us share in it alike. Rather it is only all the more awful, if it comes to that. The wider the condemnation, the worse for humanity. I regret that my ancestors only a generation or two back, were hideous fiends in human form, and you console me by assuring me, with your graceful English condescension, that about the same time your own progenitors, too, were devils incarnate. A poor sort of topsy-turvy, 'You're another!' 'Father Confessor, I am dreadfully wicked.' 'Yes, dear son, but all the rest of us are really every bit as bad as you are.' There, there, old girl; keep quiet, keep quiet. Your Highness's troubles will soon be over. You'll find yourself now after ten minutes at Chichele's room in a congenial atmosphere of all the diseases and all the poisons."

"But, Ali, you don't mean to say you're descended yourself from Begum Johanna?"

The black doctor gave a sudden start of unfeigned horror. "Me?" he cried. "Me, did you say, Chichele? Heaven forbid it. No, not descended from her! Thank God, not a drop of that terrible woman's cursed blood flows in a single vein of mine, Harry. You forget her name—she was a Christian—Johanna. A converted Hindoo, I mean, not a Mohammedan. All my people are Moslems of the purest type, descendants of the Arab missionaries to India. But the Hindoos, who believe in transmigration, you know, have a strange story that the Begum's soul took up its abode after death in the body of a rattlesnake. A very appropriate dwelling-place, indeed! She was that, and worse than it. So that's why I call our lady here the Begum. I sometimes fancy vaguely to myself—you know we Indians are an imaginative race—that the Hindoo theories are right after all, and that Begum Johanna's bloodthirsty soul lives to this day in my treacherous snake here. Look at her eyes! How deadly! how jealous! Look at her fangs! How sleek and cruel. Quiet, your highness; quiet, quiet; you're nearly home now."

They had reached the middle of the one long grey street of Polperran, and, as Ali spoke, a pony-carriage drove lightly past them, with a dark Cornish girl holding the reins. She smiled in much amusement at the incident of the truck, and bowed a hasty bow, as she passed, to Harry Chichele.

"Pretty girl, isn't she?" Harry Chichele said, raising his sailor's cap with a graceful movement. "That's Miss Tregellas, the rector's daughter. She's the belle of Polperran. Renders existence here endurable for the present. Otherwise, I'm sure I don't know how I should ever have got through the summer without you, Ali."

"She's more than pretty," Mohammad Ali answered, his voice drop-

ping to a chivalrous undertone. "She has a sweet face ; good as well as beautiful. Your English women are goddesses, Harry. Why was I born in India, I wonder ? Just fancy me marrying an Indian woman—a doll of a creature taken straight from the zenana to Middlesex Hospital ! The idea's grotesque. I could never dream of it. An Englishwoman's the only woman fit for me. And yet no Englishwoman would ever for a moment think of taking me. Strange that a mere distinction of cuticle should so completely cut a man off from all his natural peers and helpmates ! Brain and soul and spirit may be civilized and European as you please ; but none of them will weigh one grain in the scales against a wrong sort of epidermis ! I wonder, now, why the epidermis should be considered, socially speaking, such a very important part of human anatomy !"

Harry Chichele laughed an unconcerned laugh. "My dear fellow," he said, in a good-humoured tone, "your mistake lay in ever divorcing yourself from your natural surroundings. You ought to have stopped in India, you know, and then you'd have been satisfied, like all your ancestors, with the good women of your own country. Now you've come to England, of course you won't put up with the type of beauty usually admired by the faithful of Islam."

"Never !" Mohammad Ali cried with a shudder. "Heaven forbid so great a degradation ! But, for all that, I'm glad I came to England. To stop in India is to starve one's own moral and mental nature. To come here is growth, development, emancipation, freedom !" And he stroked his moustache meditatively with his dusky hand, as he stooped down once more to inspect in her close cage the now quiet and slumbering Begum.

CHAPTER II.

THE next morning was a glorious English August day, calm and clear, with bright blue sky and glassy sea ; and Harry Chichele took Mohammad Ali out for a walk along the beautiful weather-worn cliffs of Polperran.

The two young men had been students together at the Middlesex Hospital, where Harry Chichele was employed as junior house physician. Some months had passed, however, since they had last met, and Mohammad Ali, at the end of his medical course in London, had gone out to spend the winter in India, on a visit to his parents, and had only just returned to England, bringing with him an appropriate present for his old fellow-student, in the shape of the Begum. For Harry Chichele was allowed to be the greatest rising authority in England on germs and poisons, and he was just then engaged on a series of minute researches into the bite of a common English viper as compared with that of various other venomous snakes and poisonous reptiles. It was the vipers, in fact, that had brought him for his summer holiday

into Cornwall ; for the wild heather-covered moors that surrounded Polperran on every side supply the very spots where the sun-loving adders delight to bask, and the lizards to bathe themselves in the broad sunshine on the sand banks and open patches.

"The sea looks magnificent this morning," Harry Chichele said, as they reached the summit of a jagged and pinnaced granite crag, that jutted out boldly into the deep emerald-green bay below. "What a lovely purple on the distant horizon, and what a perfect calm over the whole Channel. I love to see it, vast and illimitable and silent like that ! Some people say the sea is always so changeable. For my part, Ali, it's rather the grand monotony and infinity of the ocean that makes it most sublime and beautiful to me."

"Ugh, don't speak of it, my dear boy," Mohammad Ali cried with a sudden shudder. "If you had been tossed about helpless upon the bosom of Biscay, as I've been for the last ten days or so, you'd never want to rhapsodize again about the sea as long as you live, I can tell you. That's a pretty sight that schooner over yonder, under full sail. Hand me your field-glass : I'd like to have a good look at her."

"A lovely morning," Harry Chichele went on musingly. "So still and breathless. Glorious weather for a rousing epidemic. How the conqueror germ would float and fatten on the stagnant air ! How he'd spread and revel in this basking sunshine ! What splendid chances one would have to watch the growth and development of a good popular plague, wouldn't one ?"

Mohammad Ali levelled the glass and swept the horizon rapidly for a moment ; then he said, in a quieter and more subdued voice, "There's a yacht over yonder I don't quite understand. She's only got a single sail spread. Everything else in sight is under all canvas. There's hardly a breath of air stirring. Why on earth should she have no more canvas on ?"

Harry Chichele took the glasses as Ali handed them, and looked intently at the shadowy yacht upon the dim horizon. "By George !" he murmured, "it's certainly curious. She hardly seems to be moving at all. And she's got her sail set most oddly. I don't understand what the dickens she's driving at. There seems to be something or other wrong about her."

Mohammad Ali raised the glasses to his eyes once more. "She gives one a creepy feeling, anyhow," he said, scanning her close. "The rigging looks all so bare and skeleton-like. I can make her out a great deal better now. She isn't drifting. She's not a derelict. There's a man at the tiller ; a single man. I don't see anybody else on board. Let's go and have a look at her with the coastguard's telescope. I feel convinced there's something serious the matter."

The coastguard on the summit of the neighbouring peak was sweeping the sea idly with his glass, and evidently had not yet noticed this particular very suspicious-looking yacht, away to westward. As soon as Mohammad Ali called his attention to her, however, he gave a sudden low whistle, and gazed at her long and curiously through his small pocket telescope. "There's something up," he exclaimed at

once. "She ain't lost any of her masts or sails, that's clear. They're all reefed up quite regular and proper, and everything ship-shape as you'd wish to see it. But she's got the rummiest-looking sail set I ever clapped eyes on, and there's only one man visible anywhere aboard of her. Yacht o' that size and tonnage, I take it, ought to have at least three of a watch to manage her. He's single-handed, that's where it is. I can make him out now. He's holding the tiller and keeping a tight hand on the sheet at the same time. Seems as if he was master and mate and cabin-boy, all rolled into one. She ain't flying no distress signals neither : that's odd. But there's a red handkerchief flapping on the sheet—looks as if it was meant to attract attention."

Harry Chichel focussed the telescope on the doubtful yacht, and raked her over, fore and aft, with a close scrutiny. "She's in distress," he said at last, decisively. "Not a doubt in the world about that. The man's holding the tiller in one hand, and the sheet in the other. There's a red handkerchief tied to the sheet, as you say, and he gives it a shake every now and again on purpose to be noticed. He's trying to signal us—I'm sure of that. Ha, now he's waving a handkerchief in his hand. He sees us, he sees us ! He's making signs to us."

"Better go back to Polperran at once," Mohammad Ali suggested, hastily, "and put out a boat to see what's the matter."

They walked back at their best speed to the little cove—a bay of white sand, hemmed in on every side by granite cliffs—and hired a row-boat from a man on the beach. Two stalwart fishermen manned the boat for them, and took the oars.

The men rowed hard, and the yacht sailed sluggishly on before the faint and almost imperceptible breeze until they had got nearly within hailing distance. Mohammad Ali held the field-glass in his hand. "There's only one man, sure enough," he said in a grave voice, eyeing him closely, "and even he seems scarcely fit to work a vessel. He's ghastly pale, and very feeble-looking. He totters about when he moves on the deck. It's about the most mysterious ship I ever saw. Never a sign of life about her. She looks, somehow, like a plague-stricken city."

"Perhaps," Harry said, "the owner's trying to navigate her alone. You know people will go in for these foolhardy adventures."

They drew closer and saw the yacht, with all her sails, save that one solitary triangular piece of canvas, furled and reefed on the yards in due order—a bare hull, drifting slowly, slowly, slowly on, before that breathless and motionless air of August. Nothing but the current was bearing her along. Not a sound or a movement came from the yacht. The water hardly sheered off from her bows as she glided imperceptibly on. She seemed to slacken even as they approached, and to lie idle at last in perfect inaction upon the calm surface of that unruffled sea.

"I can make out her name," Mohammad Ali mused aloud. "*The Seamew*, of London. A pretty little craft, but deadly still. There must be some curious mystery about her."

As he spoke, Mohammad Ali laid down the field-glass with a cry of surprise. "The man's ill," he cried ; deadly ill. He looks almost as if he were dying. He can hardly hold himself up on the deck. Pull

alongside, quick, will you? There, that'll do. *Seamew*, ahoy! ahoy! ahoy, there!"

The one occupant of the deserted yacht flung up his hands with a wild shout, and let go at once both sheet and tiller. "Ahoy! ahoy! ahoy!" he answered, in a hollow voice, with convulsive eagerness.

"What's up?" Mohammad Ali shouted, between his hands.

"Hold off," the stranger hailed back, in a terrible tone of tremulous warning, his hands held open deprecatingly before him. "Cholera! cholera!"

At the sound of that awful and dreaded word, the two fishermen dropped their oars at once, as if by magic, and let the boat float idly of herself upon the glassy water. "The Lord preserve us!" one of them murmured, with sudden horror. "Stop where you are! Not another stroke! We can't go near her! We mustn't go near her!"

"Go on!" Mohammad Ali cried, in a tone of command. "The man's dying. We can't stop here. If you don't go on, you'll be too late to save him."

"Not another stroke," the first fisherman answered, doggedly.

"You're a coward," the Indian cried, seizing the oar, with a sudden burst of fiery indignation, and showing his pearl-white teeth like a dog in the heat of his anger. "Come along, Harry. Take the oars from them, quick, will you. We must pull alongside and help this poor fellow. Coward, I say! Cowards, both of you! I never knew before that seafaring men could be so cowardly."

"I'm not afraid of the worst storm that ever blew out of God's heaven," the fisherman answered, holding tight to his oar and disputing its possession; "but hang me if I'm ever going for you or for no man to bring the cholera home to Polperran."

Mohammad Ali glanced at him hard with unconcealed scorn. "My friend," he said, "we two are doctors. We're no more afraid of the cholera, we two, than you're afraid of a bit of a light sou'-wester. Is this the bravery you Englishmen boast of! What would you do if we doctors were to shirk danger as you do? It's our work and our duty to face the cholera, and get the better of it, as it's your work and your duty to face and outlive the very fiercest hurricane that ever rode on the angry Atlantic. Pull us alongside, I tell you, at once, or let us pull ourselves if you're afraid of it. I'm not going to run away from danger now like a cowardly deserter."

"You may do as you like with the cholera yourself," the fisherman answered, still grasping the oar. "Of course, it's your business. But me and my mate'll have nothing to say to it, so that's flat, and you may as well be satisfied."

He spoke firmly, with the dogged obstinacy of the Cornish race showing strong in his voice and manner, and Mohammad Ali felt at once it was no use parleying further with him. Quick as lightning the sinuous young Indian stood up in the stern and shouted once more to the death-like figure in the *Seamew* opposite.

"How many on board?" he cried, with a loud cry.

"Only one more," the stranger answered with a terrible effort.

"And he's dying."

"Where?"

"On deck here."

"And the rest?"

"All dead. Owner and eight hands of them. Cholera broke out on board the third day out from Santander. I've navigated the yacht myself alone since yesterday morning. Send out a doctor as quick as you can to save the boy here."

Mohammad Ali answered nothing. He did not hesitate for a single second. Swift as thought, he pulled off his coat, flung it into the stern, jumped on to the thwart, raised his hands together high above his head, and plunged forthwith, like a practised diver as he was, into the calm and placid water below. A few dozen strokes brought him fairly alongside, for he breasted the sea with powerful arms, and swam ahead with all the fierce and eager energy of a sudden resolution. The man on the yacht crawled feebly to the ship's side, fastened a rope with trembling fingers to a brass peg, and threw it over towards the Indian doctor with an evident effort. Mohammad Ali caught it lightly as it fell, and hauled himself up, hand over hand, with Eastern agility, till he stood at last, erect and dripping, but tall and straight as ever, on the deck of the *Seamew*. As he did so, the stranger flung himself down, tottering and faint, upon the deck, and pointing with his bloodless fingers to a huddled figure close to the mast, cried aloud with a voice of terrible entreaty, "Send out a doctor to save the boy, can you?"

"I'm a doctor myself," Mohammad Ali answered, laying his hand gently on the stranger's shoulder with quick perception of the situation. "There's hope yet. Don't despair. Harry, ahoy, there! Row back with those two cowards as fast as you can, and get some better men than them to come aboard and take charge of these poor sick fellows. I'll bring the yacht in round the headland there as well as I'm able, and drop anchor off the point till you come back to me."

"All right," Harry Chichele answered from the boat, with professional coolness. "You'll stop aboard, then, till I come again. Is it really cholera?"

"Yes; it's cholera. Asiatic cholera."

"How very interesting," Harry Chichele murmured calmly to himself. "Now we shall have a good chance of watching the development of the disease properly."

"Row back at once!" the Indian shouted aloud once more from the yacht. "There's no time to be lost. Row back, I say, and bring out a medicine chest and some proper food for them. And, by the way, you may bring me some dry things at the same time, for these aren't quite the kind of clothes to nurse a sick man in."

Harry Chichele nodded assent, and gave a sign to go to the two fishermen. The men, nothing loth to leave that poisoned neighbourhood, seated themselves once more gladly upon the thwarts, and rowed with long strokes for the shore by the Cove of Polperran.

A European suddenly and unexpectedly placed in such an appalling position would have found himself immensely incommoded and weighed down by his dripping garments. But Mohammad Ali, in spite of his English education and culture, still remained at heart an Indian of the Indians. Without a moments hesitation he stripped of his wet clothes with incredible speed, wound the yacht's flag round his body like a native loin-cloth, and stood forth in the blazing sunlight in another minute, just the ordinary Indian Mohammedan gentleman in the simple undress of his own compound. The transformation took but a few seconds to produce, but at the end it was complete and perfect: he had gone back at a stroke from the coast of Cornwall to the blazing sunshine of the North-West Provinces.

Meanwhile the yacht, now left to herself, with her one canvas hardly flapping in the still air, and her rudder swaying at its own free will with the vague current, had drifted idly along towards the headland; for the one man who alone remained capable of guiding her course had collapsed at once the moment Mohammad touched the deck. The young Indian seized the sheet as soon as his metamorphosis was fairly concluded, and made it fast to a peg on the gunwale. Then he took the tiller and steered for the lee of the jutting headland, where two minutes later he dropped anchor in clear green water with a firm bottom.

Then for the first time since he came on board he was able to devote himself to his strange patients.

He did not trouble the man at first with questions. He was far too skilled a nurse for that. Without a single word he went down calmly into the stifling little cabin, still heavy with the terrible fumes of disease, and brought up one by one the bedding and pillows from two of the bunks, with a few sheets, rugs, and blankets. He laid them down on deck with deft and careful hands, arranged them all as neatly as in a hospital, and stretched above the top of the two beds thus hastily prepared a sort of tent or awning, improvised off-hand with a square of canvas and a couple of marlines-spikes. That done, he proceeded with a woman's gentleness to loosen the clothes of both his patients, and lift them tenderly in his arms to the beds prepared for them. It was, in fact, a little hastily-made out-door hospital; and the Indian doctor arranged it all as methodically and quietly in his single-handed state as if he had had the usual army of nurses and dressers all waiting obsequious for his merest wave or nod of suggestion.

It was not until his patients were both safely housed in their rough tents that Mohammad Ali turned at last to examine more closely the cases which a strange caprice of chance had thus handed over to his ministering care. The elder of the two strangers was a tall young man, handsome and gentlemanly, so far as one could judge in his present condition, but with a keen sunken face through which the sharp bones already peeped, and deep-set eyes worn out and wasted by long anxiety and sleepless watching. Mohammad Ali knelt over him in silence, and scanned closely his mouth and twitching nostrils. The young man, opening his eyes for a second, seized the dark hand in a perfect fervour

of unspoken gratitude. He could not utter a single word—his strength at last had failed him—but he pointed with a spasmodic effort of his lean arm toward the pale and insensible boy at his side.

The Indian soothed his wasted hand tenderly, and turned to the boy with a desponding gesture. He raised the lad's head a little on the pillow, just to ease his companion's mind—for he saw at once that that case was hopeless—and then went back again with a sympathetic face to the elder patient. He drew back the hair from his high forehead with a delicate touch, and laid his own cold hand upon the burning brow. Then he looked at the young man steadily for a moment, and whispered in a low distinct voice, "How long since you left Santander?"

The patient moistened his parched lips to reply, and raised his head; but the words seemed somehow to stick in his throat. At last he managed to gasp out in a weak whisper, "Three weeks ago."

"And the dead?" Mohammad Ali asked softly.

"Threw them overboard."

"Good," the Indian replied with a satisfied nod. "You did well. That's right, anyhow. You shall be properly nursed. We'll pull you through yet, my friend and I, with the help of Allah, the All-wise, the All-Merciful One."

The young man's hand dropped listlessly upon the hard pillow. Mohammad Ali seated himself, cross-legged, beside him on the deck. His native habits seemed to return at once with that simple unencumbering native dress. He fanned the sufferer gently with his hand. For a long while he sat and watched in unbroken silence. Both the patients, relieved by the change and the loosening of their clothes, seemed half to drop into the drowsy condition.

After a while, he spoke in a low voice again. "Your name?" he asked simply, as the patient opened his eyes for a moment.

"Ivan Royle," the young man answered, as in a dream.

The Indian bowed his head and said nothing. He only shaded his eyes with his hand from the glare of the sun, and gazed across the unruffled expanse of sea towards the Cove of Polperran, on the eager look-out for Harry Chichele's expected arrival.

"I hope he'll remember to bring fresh water," he murmured, half to himself. "The water on board must all be horribly infected by this time. I hope he'll remember to bring everything. But, thank goodness, Harry has a clear head. We need it, too, with a case like this on hand. But we'll pull him through still, with the help of Allah."

CHAPTER III.

FOR full two hours the Indian doctor sat, cross-legged, on the yacht's deck, under the awning of his improvised tent, closely watching the pinched faces of his two new and unknown patients. He sat there all the time with the true East Indian cat-like patience, fanning their faces alternately with his hands, and listening eagerly for the dip of oars upon the distant water. At last, a faint plash from beyond the second headland seemed to fall upon his quick senses. He stood up, put his open palm, shell-shaped, to his ear, and strained his hearing to its utmost pitch of absorbed attention. Yes, yes, it was the plash of oars, undoubtedly. Harry Chichele must be coming, at length, to aid and relieve him.

The plash of oars grew nearer and nearer, and men's voices could be distinctly heard round the sharp corner of the granite headland. Presently, they turned the point of serpentine rock, and emerged, at last, into full view. There were two boats, one behind the other. In the first sat four stout Cornish fishermen. In the second, towed behind it by a rope, Harry Chichele was seated alone, in solemn silence.

The boats drew up about two hundred yards from the yacht's moorings. Then the men leaned upon their oars, and threw off the rope with which they were towing Harry Chichele. Harry had a pair of light sculls in his own boat. With them he rowed himself hastily alongside, and Mohammad Ali, leaning over the gunwale, flung out a hawser, and hauled him on board. They made the small boat fast, in silence, to the stern. Then the four fishermen waved them adieu once more with their hands, and glided away in hot haste from the infected purlieus, leaving those two once more alone, and face to face with the deadly pestilence.

Mohammad Ali's lip curled as before with inexpressible contempt as he gazed back upon the retreating boat's crew. "These fellows were afraid for their own skins, I suppose," he said, with a scornful gesture, as he turned away. "Wouldn't come within half a mile of the danger of infection!"

"No," Harry Chichele answered, still making fast the ropes, and pulling in his belongings from the small boat. "Not a soul could I get to come aboard. If you want to see what cowards men can be upon occasion, just ask them to face an unknown epidemic. Most men are brave enough in the presence of a danger that you can fight to the face with fangs and muscles and active energy; but when it comes to a danger that you have to oppose passively and unresistingly, the best of them will back out of it as gracefully as possible. We medical men are the only ones who will take a risk of this sort upon ourselves without a moment's hesitation."

"Nobody would come?"

"No, nobody. The whole village is simply mad with terror. That is to say, nobody, except Miss Tregellas, the rector's daughter. She volunteered to come and help us nurse—she's been trained in one of these local institutions, I fancy—but as there was no other woman willing to chance it, of course, her father couldn't allow her to come aboard with us."

"What have you done, then, and what do you propose doing?"

"Oh, I just telegraphed up to the authorities at Falmouth, asking them if they could send us a couple of men to take the yacht round into Falmouth Harbour for the necessary quarantine, and, meanwhile, if they don't hurry, I propose we should lie by here for to-night; we're pretty well under shelter where we are, and, unless the wind rises, which doesn't seem likely, we ought to manage very well till morning."

"You've brought water?"

"Yes. Water, medicines, food, and disinfectants."

"That's well. Now we must get to work in earnest. One of the cases is already in collapse, the other may be saved if we take it in hand systematically and promptly."

Without wasting another minute on talk, the doctors went silently and quietly to work, and soon had treated both their patients with all the care modern science has been able to suggest. They kept them still bivouacked on the open deck—that was far better than the stuffy little cabin—and there they tended them with ceaseless attention till noon was passed, and evening began to draw in upon them. Harry had brought provisions in the boat, and fresh clothes for Mohammad Ali. But it was not till the heat of the day was fairly past that the Indian consented to put them on and give up the freedom of his simple costume.

By five o'clock they had made themselves quite at home upon the yacht, and had even brewed themselves a cup of tea, with water from the cask Harry brought with him. The evening was warm, though a slight breeze had now risen, and, after a short consultation, they both decided it would be better to leave their patients on deck than entrust them to the mercies of the stuffy little cabin.

All through the evening they sat and watched, talking in a low tone one to the other, and attending to the many wants of their charges. The boy, as Mohammad Ali had perceived from the first, was slowly sinking; but the man Royle, revived by the powerful medicines Harry had brought, showed signs of throwing off the poison of the disease. And as they sat and talked, the breeze grew gradually fresher and fresher, and the yacht began to sway about, with a long swinging motion, on the lumpy surface.

"Good thing for the patients, this nice cool wind," Mahammad Ali observed complacently. "But I hope it won't get up much stronger before morning, for it's veered around to the east, I see, and we're lying here off a lee shore now. It'd be awkward if it were to come on to blow hard. We neither of us know much about yachting."

"Oh, no fear," Harry Chichele answered, in an unconcerned tone,

with a glance to windward. "The breeze won't rise, and, if it does, I understand enough about sailing to keep the *Seamew* beating about afloat till morning. You should see this coast in a good storm; it's just magnificent. I wouldn't like a blow, though, myself, for one thing. These are two very interesting cases. You've watched cholera before, of course, in India, so it doesn't matter very much to you; but for me this is a rare opportunity. It'd be a nuisance to have the cases disturbed, and be prevented from seeing them out to their full conclusion. Now, you couldn't possibly have two nicer or more typical cases than these; because the boy'll die, and the man, I expect, will pull through somehow. So, if nothing untoward intervenes to prevent it, I shall have a splendid chance of seeing the course of the disease in both directions—death and recovery."

The Indian looked at him with a strange and doubtful gleam in his large, mild eyes. "Harry," he said, "you're a very strange fellow. I never saw any man in my life so professional as you are. You seem to take only a scientific interest in all your patients; you never regard them for a moment, it seems to me, as objects of living human sympathy."

Harry laughed. "Medicine is medicine, after all, my dear boy," he answered lightly. "One's first business is to watch one's case; and I do love a good case. I don't deny it. It's an acquired taste, but it's necessary—it's necessary. Without it, we could have no true science—nothing but a sort of generous and unsatisfactory sympathetic guess-work."

Mohammad Ali looked at him and mused. "Begum Johanna of Deoband," he began at last —

"Oh, bother Begum Johanna of Deoband," the young Englishman interrupted hastily. "No offence meant to your country, Ali; but this is hardly the moment, I take it, for particulars as to Begums, past, present, or future."

Mohammad Ali answered nothing. He merely stroked his meditative chin in silence, very much Arab fashion, and watched his English friend again with close attention. "Your grandfather, Sir Isaac Chichele," he began once more, "when he was governor of the North-West Provinces —"

But before he could get any further with his sentence, Ivan Royle, the elder of their two unknown patients, raised his head feebly from his pillow, and, in a parched voice, asked querulously for a drop of water.

Harry rose quick and light at once to fetch it, and held it to his dry and fevered lips with care and patience almost equal to Mohammad Ali's own. The grateful light shone once more in Royle's sunken eyes, and he muttered "Thank you," with a fervent earnestness which meant far more than the words conveyed of heartfelt gratitude.

The evening was now closing in fast, and the sea was rising everywhere around them. It was indeed a strange and weird situation. They lay alone there, two landmen together, in sole charge of that pestilential yacht, with two patients, smitten with a terrible disease,

huddled on deck helpless before them. All round, the sea was beginning, under the influence of light and fitful gusts, to loup and shiver. White crests were gathering on the higher waves. In front stretched that ironbound Cornish coast, beset with crag and pillar and pinnacle, a terror to far more experienced seamen. The stars came out one by one in the sky overhead. The long lights glimmered in lines across the dancing waves from the houses of Polperran. A shrill breeze whistled now and again through the bare rigging. Everything spoke of solitude and danger.

"If the wind goes on rising like this," Mohammad Ali murmured, as he fixed a light unsteadily to the foremast, "we shall have to take them downstairs to the cabin, or she'll be shipping seas, and they'll probably get a fatal wetting."

"It'll be hard if we must," Harry Chichele answered, balancing himself, landsman-like, on the rolling deck "for they won't have half such a chance below as they have up here in the full fresh air."

On shore that night the gossips of Polperran sat late, discussing the strange yacht in the little roadside village public. Sensations were rare indeed at Polperran. Sometimes, to be sure, in thick November weather, a great West Indian or American liner lost her way hopelessly among the bays and coves, and dashed her huge bulk to pieces at last upon the solid cliffs of those grim and gloomy granite headlands. But such a lurid sensation as a cholera ship standing off the cove itself was quite a novelty to the village wiseacres; and they sat far beyond the legal hours (on plea of public necessity constraining them) in eager conclave as to the action likely to be taken by the Falmouth authorities.

It was a wild night on the English Channel. The storm came on with almost tropical rapidity. All through the evening the wind kept rising with increasing force, till at last, as the church clock of Polperran tolled out eleven, the solitary coastguardman turned to his report-sheet, and marked it down on the Admiralty paper as "half a gale," with official accuracy. A minute later a sudden gust burst with fierce violence against the walls of his shelter. The coastguardman toiled alone up the dark path—it was a moonless night—that led along the brow of the jagged precipices, marked out by whitewashed stones at even distances, and looked anxiously out to sea for signs of distress from any passing smack or schooner.

"Wonder how that there cholera yacht gets on through this," he thought to himself, as he neared the crag that hemmed in the bay where the *Seamew* was riding alone at anchor. "Bad weather to-night on a lee shore. Hard living for a yacht in a squall like this. She's got no sea-room, and they're raw hands. Shouldn't be surprised if she dragged her anchor."

He hurried on with blind steps to the summit of the jutting crag, and carefully approaching the steep edge of that tremendous precipice, where the cliff toppled over with a sheer descent into six hundred feet of thick darkness, he peered cautiously down into the black abyss at his feet to spy out the whereabouts of the suspicious *Seamew*.

Down, down, down, yards and yards and yards below, in that dizzy

black chasm that yawned beneath him, a single light, fastened at a masthead, swayed and tottered, like a will-o'-the-wisp, through the gloom and mystery of that tempestuous evening. The coastguard lay on his face upon the edge of the cliff, and gazed over in horror on that solitary gleam cast feebly up from the abysmal darkness. The *Seamew* must have dragged her anchor, indeed, and must now be on the very verge of dashing, alone and unmanned save by those two unskillful landmen, against the naked base of those terrific precipices. It was a terrible situation. She was slowly nearing the dangerous crags. By the dim light of the single lamp he could even make out the reflection on the white spray that broke in sheets of beaten foam against the fierce line of granite barriers. The *Seamew* was hardly holding off at all; another gust must surely dash her against them, and grind her to atoms between the raging waves and the solid wall of uprearing precipice.

"She can't hold off, no matter how they handle her!" the coastguardman cried aloud to himself, as he stumbled back into the path by the white-washed landmarks, and hurried down, with trembling footsteps, to the cove off Polperran.

Before he got there, the wind, swooping down upon the bay from the dales and valleys, was raving wildly upon the little beach. No man at Polperran had ever beheld such a night before. For suddenness and fierceness the onslaught was terrific; the full fury of the gale had broken forth with the turn of the tide, and nothing now could save the *Seamew*. Even if the most experienced hands in Polperran had manned her that night, there was no living, on a lee shore, in so terrible a tempest. The storm, in its might, could have lifted her up and dashed her against the precipices, as a child might dash a bottle against the wall. It was all up with the dreaded cholera vessel.

The folk at the public-house rose at once, as the coastguard pushed his white face in at the door, and cried aloud of the danger to the *Seamew*. One moment before, the gossips of Polperran had had no thought, save how to keep that hateful cholera ship at a safe distance. But with the first breath of peril from the sea, the seaman's instinct rose strong and irrepressible within them, and every man cried with one accord, "Come on to the cove! We must launch the life boat!"

The two fishermen, who had rowed out Harry and Mohammad Ali that morning, were the first to rush down eagerly to the shore, and help out with the boat on her mission of mercy. The others followed in hot haste, and pushed the big craft, creaking and groaning, through the roaring surf, that now beat in huge breakers upon the narrow cove and its guardian headlands. The coxswain stood up at his place in the stern, the crowd on shore cheered lustily, and the lifeboat, driven ahead by twenty strong arms, ploughed her way, baffled and dashed back, with stout endurance through the foam and spray of the white-crested billows.

It was hard work to round the first headland into the outer bay, where the *Seamew* that morning had fixed her moorings. The wind dashed the lifeboat wildly towards the solitary stacks that rose in tall pinnacles from the end of the point, and the sea, bursting over them

time and again, threatened to wash the rowers bodily from their seats. The storm took the very breath out of their bodies. But those stout Cornish hearts endured for all that, and by sheer dint of thews and muscles, straining and labouring, battled the fierce fury of that sudden gale, till they almost reached the stranded side of the now drifting and helpless *Seamew*. Every man nerved his arms to the work, and every heart on shore stood still with awe, as the two lights on the stormy water, tossing and wavering on the crest of the spray, drew nearer and nearer one to the other.

Would they ever reach her? Could they ever lie by her? Had she not got too far among the breakers?

At last in the deep trough of the long swelling wave, the lifeboat, taking advantage of momentary lull, drove herself close alongside, and the coxswain rising eager in his place, caught hold of a hawser, flung out to him with all the mad energy of despair by an unseen hand on the deck of the *Seamew*.

She was lying close under the black rocks, just held off by the back-current force of the under-tow, and ready in one moment to grate awfully against the dark stacks that rose to the abyss of darkness above. The surf was hammering and pounding against her sides; spray and brine blinded their eyes; the roar of the breakers deafened their ears. Boiling and seething wildly in its swirling rage, the sea seemed ready to swamp and founder them.

What happened in the next five minutes, no single actor in that terrible scene could ever have recovered. A wild phantasmagoria of foam and rocks and driven water floated with horrible vividness and reality before them. A fierce wind whistled madly through the torn and tattered rigging of the yacht. A great black wall of rock and crag rose ominous in front to the dusky vault of heaven overhead. Below, two helpless hulls tossed and rolled with infinite jars and shocks and colliding broadsides one against the other. And out of it all, dimly perceived, and but half realized, two dark figures, encircled in spray, loomed uncertain upon the heaving and groaning deck of the *Seamew*—two dark figures etched out against the sky, erect and strong, but bearing each in his stout arms a strange burden, wrapped up in swathes of muffling bed-clothes. How they ever got into the lifeboat nobody knew. These great critical moments of our lives pass too fast and absorb our inmost energies too profoundly to be ever consciously recognised or perceived by us. But a minute later, one thing was certain; the lifeboat had headed around once more through the boisterous billows for Polperran Cove, four strange objects cowered and huddled at the bottom by the stern, and the wreck of the *Seamew*, a helpless derelict, was shivering and crashing its snapped timbers in a mad onslaught against the iron wall of those gigantic overhanging granite precipices.

They heard her crash against the crags in one fierce burst of assault. Even above the roar and howling of wind and sea, the groans of her beams, as they broke short, like twigs, grated upon their ears. Next moment, they saw the *Seamew* no more, but a rushing mass of white water in her place, and a black wall of rock beyond it.

CHAPTER IV.

THE lifeboat made her way back more easily than she had come, for the sea was running high towards land, and carried them on its crest, with a rush and a roar, into the little cove. They beached her, with a run, on the shelving shingle, and then disembarked, wet and cold, upon the solid land, amid a circling crowd of sympathizing and eager men and women.

All Polperran by this time, indeed, was on the beach to receive them. But as they landed, the crowd fell back awe-struck to right and left, in the dim light of lamps and lanterns, and sidled off wider and wider on either hand from that terrible infection. Even the men from the lifeboat themselves, now their self-imposed work of mercy was over, slunk away one by one, appalled at the danger, from the four passengers of the doomed *seamew*. To be sure, while the task of rescuing them was still to be done, all thought of contagion had been banished from their minds; the seaman's spirit had nerved and inspired them; but the moment they stood once more on dry land, face to face with the fear of pestilence, their natural terror reasserted itself afresh, and they shrank away from those four plague-stricken men, till at last Harry Chichele and Mohammad Ali stood alone, with their unconscious charges, in the midst of an ever-widening and distant ring of terrified spectators.

For a minute or two an awful silence, save for the roar and dash of the sea upon the beach, reigned all around. Then Harry Chichele, looking about upon the mute white faces that everywhere surrounded him, asked in a simple, straightforward voice, "Where can we take these poor people?"

The crowd of fisherfolk turned one to another in eager debate, but nobody volunteered to give an answer. It was clear that not a soul in Polperran was willing to take in the dreaded cholera patients to his own home. They might die on the beach for all the crowd cared, before any man out of charity would house them.

"Is there no cottage-hospital or anything of the sort?" Mohammad Ali asked impetuously.

The crowd whispered and fidgeted uneasily again, but nobody attempted to suggest a reply.

Harry Chichele looked around him with a puzzled air. "What on earth are we to do, Ali?" he exclaimed at last. "This is almost as bad as the sea, isn't it?"

As he spoke, a fresh figure glided suddenly through the closed circle, and, without a moment's hesitation, came up to his side. It was a delicate girl, dressed in a simple dark evening dress of some thin material, with a garden hat confining her dark hair, and a pretty white Shetland woollen wrap thrown lightly in a fold around her slender neck and

shoulders. Her bright black eyes gleamed like diamonds in the rays of the lantern, and her white hand, laid with feminine pity on Ivan Royle, as he lay huddled and muffled in the rugs and wrappings, seemed small and beautiful as some fairy's in a fairy tale. Mohammad Ali recognised her at once. It was the girl whom Harry had pointed out the day before as Miss Tregellas, the rector's daughter.

"They must come to the rectory, Dr. Chichele," she said in a quiet, self-possessed tone, which contrasted well with the slavish terror of those demoralized fisherfolk. "There's nowhere else in Polperran you could possibly take them. We can make them comfortable and nurse them there. Bring them up immediately."

"My dear Olwen!" her father cried, hurrying up behind her; "to the rectory did you say? Do you think you ought to take them there? Consider the risks, my dear; consider yourself; consider the servants."

The girl turned to him with the same, quiet, unterrified manner as before. "It's the only possible place, papa," she answered simply. "There's no help for it. We can isolate them there, and nowhere else. Besides, none of the villagers seem willing to have them. There's no time to be lost. We can't leave them out here in the cold any longer."

"But, my dear, for your own sake ——"

"I am not afraid, papa. I'd rather they came to us. There would be far less chance of its spreading to the village. I'm so glad we happened to be sitting up so late to-night."

"But Dr. Chichele, what do you think yourself? Do you think we ought to let them come to the rectory?"

"They must go somewhere, and at once," Harry answered stoutly; "if not, they'll die here, right off, of cold and exposure, if they're not dead as it is already. In common humanity you must take them in; and if nobody else will give them shelter, why, as clergyman of the parish ——"

Olwen Tregellas did not wait, for her part, to argue the question. She beckoned to one of the fishermen with her small white hand. The man, with a frightened look still settled on his face, came forward a little way in front of the group, and then stopped, as if afraid to approach nearer. "What do you want, miss?" he asked uneasily.

"The hand-cart," Olwen answered, with a quiet smile. "Bring it down here and leave it there at the side immediately. You needn't come nearer. Let nobody else expose himself to the infection. We will do all ourselves. We must try to confine it as narrowly as possible."

The man turned and darted off at full speed to the village. "I see," Mohammad Ali murmured at her side, "you understand how to deal with such cases."

Olwen looked up into his face for a moment, and started with surprise at the sudden apparition. Till that moment she had not noticed his presence. The dark skin, the pearly white teeth, the black eyes, with their light setting, all for the time took away her breath. Under such peculiar circumstances, they made her heart beat fast for a second;

then, with a little shudder, she recollected the facts, and said hastily, "I beg your pardon. I didn't somehow remember you just at first. You're Dr. Chichele's friend, of course. I think I met you yesterday, coming from the station."

The Indian noticed the startled, half-frightened expression on her face, and shrank back into himself, as a man of colour always does at the evident repugnance of whites, and especially of women, to his complexion. "My name is Mohammad Ali," he said somewhat stiffly; "I ought to have introduced myself. I'm a doctor, too, and I've been helping Chichele on the yacht with these poor patients of ours."

"Oh, yes, I know," Olwen answered, with a gentle, reassuring smile. "I've heard all about you, of course; the whole village has been talking of nothing else all day but your wonderful bravery. Everybody says it was so splendid of you to swim to the yacht, and try to save these poor people. But just for the moment, in the excitement of the landing, your know, I forgot entirely all about your being ——"

She paused embarrassed. Mohammad Ali, with oriental quickness, supplied the rest. "About my being an Asiatic," he said (it saved her ingeniously from the awkward need of saying "a black man"). "I can easily understand. But here comes the hand-cart. Lay them in gently, Harry; so, so. Take care." And he whispered something aside in his ear. It was not till after they reached the rectory that Olwen knew one of the burdens they lifted so gently and reverently into the cart had ceased to breathe before they landed from the tossing lifeboat.

In another minute they started on their way. Harry and Mohammad Ali pushed the cart; the rector and his daughter walked slowly by the side. The crowd fell back to right and left, and made an isle for them as they passed up in solemn procession to the rector's house.

"This is a real crisis," Harry Chichele said in a low voice to Olwen Tregellas, as they went along. "Much depends upon our care and success. If we can isolate this case, well and good. If not, we may have upon our shoulders the full responsibility of bringing the cholera in force to England."

"We will do our best," the girl answered, in an unfaltering voice. "And even if we fail, it'll be a comfort to think, you know, Dr. Chichele, we only tried to do what we thought our duty."

They reached at last the rectory gates, and turned into the porch—a sweet, low porch, thickly draped, Mohammad Ali observed as he entered, with clambering clematis and long sprays of jasmine—and there at last, with infinite care, they disembarked their ghastly burden. The white-faced servants who opened the door stood aghast at Miss Olwen's firm and quiet order, "Show them up to my own room, and the spare bedroom." But they were too much overcome with terror and surprise to offer any effective remonstrance. They led the way without a single word, as Harry Chichele and Mohammad Ali carried up Ivan Royle, half conscious, between them, to Miss Tregellas's own little bedroom.

That done, the young men descended once more; and this time,

with quieter footsteps, carried up a senseless burden in their arms to the adjoining room. They laid the boy upon the bed in silence, and smoothed his limbs with decent care. "Poor fellow," Mohammad Ali said, looking at the lifeless and nameless body, tenderly, "I wonder who he is? He'll need no more nursing, anyhow. He's well out of it all early."

Harry turned to go down once more. "This has been an awful night, Ali," he said, with a quiet smile; "the most awful night I ever remember; but I wouldn't have missed it for a thousand pounds. I'm glad we got them safely ashore. Now I shall be able to make researches on my own account upon these precious germs. I wanted to try independently of Pasteur. This is a splendid chance; no man ever had a better. Germs! Why, I can have whole gallons and bucketsful of them, if I choose. I shall simply settle the entire cholera question."

The black man looked at him once more, with the same uneasy glance as once before. "My dear Harry," he said, wearily, "you are too much of an enthusiast. I could almost wish you were a trifle more human and a trifle less absorbedly scientific."

CHAPTER V.

How quickly these awful memories die away! A fortnight later, the little world of Polperran was once more plodding its familiar round, exactly as though the ghastly episode of that fatal cholera ship had never flitted across the horizon of its sky, to disturb the wonted quiet of the peaceful fishing village.

Ivan Royle's convalescence, too, was incredibly rapid. The removal from all the tainted surroundings of the *Seamew*, the shock and surprise of that sudden night adventure in the lifeboat, the return to fresh, wholesome, English air, and the breezy coolness of those free Cornish moorlands, soon restored him to a health and vigour that would have seemed at first sight utterly impossible. And then there was Olwen Tregellas's careful nursing to second nature, aided by the constant and friendly attention of the two young London doctors. They all became firm friends in twenty-four hours, and before the first week was well out felt as if they had known one another for a whole lifetime. It was no wonder, therefore, that Ivan progressed favourably and rapidly. Long before the fortnight's seclusion was over, he looked and felt quite himself again, after that short and sharp attack of deadly illness.

Indeed, to say the truth, the night landing from the *Seamew* was a heroic remedy of the kill-or-cure order, and it had turned out rather in favour of curing than of killing. The cholera, and all that belonged to it, went down in a body in the doomed vessel, and Ivan Royle alone survived to tell the story of that terrible voyage.

He told it to Olwen, like the hideous dream that it was, one bright morning in that sunny bedroom, with the pretty oriental cretonne coverings, where the Banksia roses clambered in by hundreds at the open window, and the trumpet creeper hung in long flowery sprays from the pointed gables.

He had set out on the *Seamew*, so Olwen learned, for a spring cruise in the Mediterranean, sketching—for he was an artist by trade, he said, of some repute in London galleries—with his cousin Mayne, the owner of the yacht, and Mayne's fifteen-year-old boy, Theodore. They three made up the entire party—the rest were the crew—and Theodore was the eldest son—his mother's darling. All went well as they cruised and sketched round the Ægean and Sicily, Algeria and Spain, till they turned homeward at last, with the warmer weather, into the open Atlantic. At Santander, where no cholera was known to exist at the time they called there, they took on board the tainted water which had proved their ruin. The barrel containing it had floated ashore on the night of the storm from the wreck of the *Seamew*, and Harry Chichele, examining a sample under the microscope with his usual cool scientific precision, had found it simply swarming with the comma-shaped cholera germs. Mayne, the owner, was the first to sicken, and after him the crew gave way one by one, till at last Ivan Royle himself was left alone on board to navigate the yacht, with only the sick boy Theodore for sole companion.

"And then," he said, with his eyes wide open and his pupils dilated, "after all those horrors I had but one idea left in my head—to bring the boy safe to land again. I gave up all care of life for myself. I am almost alone, as it happens, in the world—to me, to live or to die is nothing—but Theodore was his mother's one joy and delight. I drank as little of the poisoned water as I could—our wines and spirits had all gone long ago—and I had nothing else to moisten my lips with. But I wanted to escape the very worst till I saw the land of England ahead, and could bring the boy safe into harbour. I knew I must fail sooner or later; I knew the horrible thing would overtake me; but I hoped it would be later rather than sooner, for the boy's sake, and for his sake only. I hoped I could keep up till I sighted land, and then I must leave him in the hands of the doctors. I would have been amply satisfied if only I had brought him in alive, and fallen myself as I reached harbour."

"And how long were you alone?" Olwen asked with trembling lips, half afraid of further exciting her convalescent.

"Twenty-four hours: from Tuesday morning till Wednesday morning, when we reached Polperran. But every hour was a whole eternity. The last of the crew died on Tuesday, and then I was left alone with the boy, hopeless and helpless, on the wide Atlantic. I could take no observations. All day and all night we steered slowly on, the faint breeze hardly filling the sail, and I looked out for land—looking, looking, looking, and hoping—through the dark hours, expecting every moment to see the Lizard loom up at last on our port bow. Oh, Miss Tregellaa, it was too terrible! Every moment was as long as a lifetime.

Hour after hour the night wore away, and the day dawned, streak by streak, pale and faint on the eastern horizon ; and I strained my eyes for the land of Cornwall, and no land rose upon the water. And there the poor boy lay, with the hand of death heavy upon him, and not a thing could I do for him but pray for land, with the remnant of the breeze dying away, and the yacht going always slower and slower. I began at last to despair of ever bringing him to shore alive, when a dim outline seemed to show itself indistinctly away to the north : and my heart jumped, and I steered as well as ever I could for the cliffs of Polperran. Even then it was an endless time to wait. I waved my handkerchief, tied to the sheet, and tried to attract some fisherman's notice. But not a fisherman hove in sight. I never saw Biscay or the English Channel so utterly deserted. Never a boat could I signal anywhere, till Chichele and his friend noticed me from the cliffs and hurried down, and that dear black fellow jumped from his boat and swam out to meet me, like the man he is. And after all it was all useless ! It was too late to save poor Theodore ! ”

“ But we mean to save you, at least,” Olwen answered gently, with tears in her eyes at the poor fellow's unavailing earnestness ; “ so we mustn't allow you to talk any more and over-excite yourself.”

“ Me ! ” Ivan Royle answered with a profound sigh. “ Ah, that's quite different. For myself, I don't mind. But that poor boy—that fresh young life—I *did* want to save him for his mother.”

As he spoke, the bedroom door opened slowly, and Mohammad Ali, noiseless and gentle as ever, glided with oriental quietness into the room.

“ It's my watch now, Miss Tregellas,” he said in his soft low tone, glancing at the sofa ; “ and I'm afraid this wicked patient of ours has been exciting himself again. He's convalescent, but he's by no means well. How do you feel now, Royle ? ”

“ Wonderfully better since that last mixture,” Ivan Royle answered, as his pretty nurse went off relieved, with a smile of farewell.

The Indian nodded a pleased nod, and assuming for a second, half in jest and half in earnest, the familiar Mussulman attitude of devotion, murmured aloud, “ That's well. Allah is great, and the man of science is nowadays his prophet.”

Ivan Royle glanced at him surprised. “ Ali,” he said, “ you're a good fellow. I owe you much, though you couldn't save poor Theodore. But you did your best, and it was grand of you to come out as you did and help us. I didn't know your people were so good. For your sake, I shall always think differently in future of your countrymen.”

The Mohammedan sighed a deep-drawn sigh. “ Allah is great,” he murmured again, with a bow of his head, “ and the universe is a vast and wonderful mystery. Why on earth should you alone, who do not value your own life, be preserved out of all that living shipload, while all the rest, who clung to this world so passionately, no doubt, went down at once before the angel of the pestilence ? Your life must have been spared to you, I believe, for some good purpose. Otherwise it wouldn't have been so fated. Kismet, kismet ! there's a deal of truth

after all, you know, in our simple old-fashioned oriental philosophy."

"A philosophy that comes in the end, Ali, merely to saying things are, on the whole, rather bad and utterly inscrutable."

"Exactly, exactly, my dear fellow. I don't deny it, Nobody recognizes it more than I do. Pessimism, pessimism, pur hopeless pessimism—pessimism masquerading as a belief in the inscrutability of the infinite, and as perfect resignation to its incomprehensible will—pessimism veiled under a thin theistic disguise by attributing everything directly to Allah, who, of course, is always inscrutable. And yet it suits us, you know ; it suits our idiosyncrasy. It's hereditary, I suppose ; everything's hereditary. We are all just what our fathers made us. Take me over to London, and cram me, and educate me, and fill me full with assorted facts, and arts, and sciences, till I am learned in all the learning of the Egyptians, not to mention the Greeks, Romans, Germans, French, English, and other miscellaneous Europeans generally—stuff me with Mill and Spencer, and Comte and Hartmann, and Hermann's physiology : and yet in the end what am I still ? Why, Mohammad Ali, an Arab of the Arabs. And what is still the burden of my song ? Why, Allah is great ! Kismet ! Bismillah !"

He spoke sadly and half scornfully of himself, yet with a certain evident undercurrent of pride in his time-honoured old Arabian ancestry. What he said, however, was quite true, and Ivan Royle, after a week's acquaintance, at once recognized its truth and justice. With all his acuteness, and gentleness, and ability, Mohammad Ali, after swallowing and digesting all the latest ideas of all the western sciences and philosophies, remained still, as he said, in his heart of hearts, an Arab of the Arabs—pessimistic, fatalist, urbane, chivalrous, acquiescent, humane, but utterly and wholly oriental in sentiment. Ivan Royle—now nearly himself again—looked at the pensive Indian face, half in admiration and half in pity, a few seconds. The restless, energetic Anglo-Saxon mind, with its eager, forward Aryan impulse, can hardly fathom the calm, restful, uncomplaining content of the oriental spirit.

"You're quite right, Ali," he murmured at last ; "we're all of us at bottom what our fathers made us. The new philosophy of Darwin and Haeckel brings us back pretty much to the old philosophy of the Hebrew preachers. The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children indeed, unto the third and fourth generation. Determinism, after all, is only fatalism the other way on."

"The fathers have eaten sour grapes," Mohammad Ali repeated solemnly, "and the children's teeth are set on edge. I know a terrible case of that myself. Begum Johanna of Deoband"—and then with a start he checked himself suddenly. Evidently Begum Johanna was for some reason or other running in his head, and he sadly wanted to disburden himself, but refrained. "Royle," he went on, in an altered tone, "it's always so, you know, with us Easterns. Time makes no difference to our innate philosophy. Read in your own Bibles your Book of Job ; what is it but the very thought and creed and poetry of

modern Islam? Kismet, kismet. Allah is great: the world is very full of evil, but we cannot fathom it, we cannot help it! There is nothing new under the sun. All these problems existed already, and were answered in just the same fatalist fashion, three thousand years ago, in the tents of the sheikhs and ameers of Edom, as they are to-day at Mecca or at Agra. Men saw that all things were very evil, and they said in reply, 'Allah is great; let Him alone, it is His doing: we cannot understand Him.' As your own Tennyson despondently puts it—why, he might almost have been a Moslem himself—'I have not made the world, and he that made it shall guide.' Isn't that just pure orientalism—the philosophy of kismet? And yet it's strange what we are to be in life should depend so much, not upon ourselves, but upon the mere accident of our great-great-grandfathers!"

"In fact," Ivan Royle said, somewhat more lightly, "the most important question after all in a man's life is just the choice he makes beforehand of a proper and suitable father and mother."

"True," the Indian replied, gravely smiling. "I wonder what Miss Tregellas's mother could have been like now? An angel, I should think, to judge by her daughter. But there, I forget myself. I'm talking now like a born Englishman, without remembering the great gulf that yawns for ever and ever between us." And he relapsed at once, with a deep sigh, into his accustomed oriental gravity of silence.

CHAPTER VI.

It was once more a glorious August day, and the joy of the summer pulsed full and free in Harry Chichele's bounding veins. He sat out in a garden chair under the big lime tree on the rectory lawn, reading a novel, and hearing the hum of the myriad bees, busily buzzing among the heavy-scented flowers. Ivan Royle, now thoroughly convalescent, sat in another chair beside him, and sketched at his leisure a dainty little water-colour of the rectory porch, with its clambering growth of clematis and jasmine. They had all taken up their abode there for the present, so as to isolate the case till the fear of infection was well over.

"What are you reading?" Ivan asked at last, after a long pause, putting his head warily on one side, and surveying his half-finished sketch with critical approbation.

"Oh, merely a novel, 'Percival's Tryst.' I suppose you've seen it. It's wonderfully clever—so weird and poetical."

"'Percival's Tryst!'" Ivan answered with a start. "Why, that's by Seeta Mayne! Seeta Mayne's a cousin of my own, you know. She's a sister of Mayne, who owned the *Seamew*, and aunt of my poor boy Theo, whom you buried down yonder."

Harry looked up at him with an appreciative glance. "It must be a great privilege," he said, seriously, "to know a woman like Seeta

Mayne. She's marvellously able. I can't say how much I admire her work. I should like to meet her. Is she personally agreeable? Is she clever in talk? Is she handsome or ugly?"

"Oh, well, she's handsome, decidedly handsome, in a grand, awful, commanding sort of way," the young artist answered, still touching up his picture. "And she's clever, too. Yes, certainly clever. And she's agreeable as well, decidedly agreeable—whenever she chooses. But she can't hold a candle, you know, in any way to our Miss Tregellas."

He said it proudly, with a certain manifest air of proprietorship in Olwen, and Harry Chichele, who had been the first comer of the three to Polperran, resented it accordingly. He looked up with a sudden flash from his book. The two men's eyes met for a second, and each read the other's secret dimly. But men are reticent to one another on such points. Neither spoke. Each looked down again with furtive haste, and continued his own avocation in silence.

A minute later, Olwen Tregellas tripped lightly across the close-mown lawn, in a simple morning dress and hat, and moved gracefully towards her two visitors. Ivan glanced at her with artistic approbation—her every movement was so bright and fairy-like—and made a mental note of her tripping step for future use in an imagined picture. She came up and glanced over his shoulder at the sketch. "Oh! how lovely," she cried with unfeigned admiration. "What a delicate touch you've got, Mr. Royle; and how exquisitely you've caught the spirit of the long, lithe curves in the jasmine!"

"I'm glad you like it," Ivan cried, delighted. "I wanted you to like it. It is yours. I'm pleased it meets its owner's approbation."

"Mine! The sketch! Oh, how awfully kind of you! I never had a real picture of my own in my life before. I shall prize it so much. It's really too good of you."

She stood long praising it and admiring it, and Harry Chichele felt half annoyed at the fervour of the thanks she gave to Ivan. Who was Ivan that he should thus come in, at the eleventh hour, as it were, interloping? He, Harry, and he alone, had discovered Olwen. What business had any other fellow thus to go meddling, without his leave, with his original discovery?

By-and-by Olwen herself turned and spoke to him. "I came out, Dr. Chichele," she said, in her timid little way, "to see if you would care to take a stroll on the cliffs with me. Papa thinks we might venture away from the grounds now, as the danger is practically all over, and I thought you'd like a blow on the moorland."

Harry's face flushed up with pleasure, and he felt at once that he had more than distanced that interloping Ivan. "It would be too delightful," he cried, enchanted. "How kind of you to ask me. I wanted a walk, and with such companionship——"

Olwen blushed. Harry laid down his book with his sentence unfinished, and they waved a friendly farewell to Ivan, who was still far too weak to dream of walking. "Royle tells me he's a cousin of Seeta Mayne's," Harry began, as they turned together out of the garden gate. "I've just been reading Percival's Tryst, you know. It's a

wonderful book. And it seems that Seeta Mayne's a cousin of Royle's, and a sister of the poor fellow who owned the *Seamew*."

"How nice it must be to know people like that," Olwe cried simply. "And how nice to be like Seeta Mayne herself, and be able to write such wonderful novels. Mr. Royle must think very little of us quiet Cornish folk if he's accustomed to mixing with such great, clever, accomplished London people."

Harry glanced at her askance with an almost shy and frightened look. It was a summer day, and she was very beautiful. "One star differeth from another in glory," he answered simply. "I dare say Seeta Mayne's awfully clever, and all that sort of thing; but she can have no good ground, whatever she may be, to think little in any way of 'quiet Cornish people.'"

Olwen toyed with her light parasol. "You know I don't care for Seeta Mayne," she went on quickly, as if to glide fast over the thin ice. "She's rather too much up in the clouds for me. She never comes down from her high horse. She lives in a world too grand, and grandiose, and noble, and ethereal for ordinary humanity."

"For my part, I admire her work very much," Harry answered carelessly, plucking a wayside flower and pulling it idly to pieces as he went. "But I can easily understand that *you* don't care for her, Miss Tregellas. You two move upon such different planes. Her mind deals wholly with an ideal world, which her fancy peoples with strange and bright and glorious creations. Your footsteps rather tread this solid earth of ours, which you strive to make better and happier and purer for every one of us. Between two such natures there is a certain great gulf fixed. Yet I believe I, from my intermediate masculine standpoint, can admire and appreciate and understand both natures equally."

"Hers is the highest, though, of course," Olwen murmured, half self-consciously. "When we are young, we always love to hear ourselves talked about."

"I'm not so sure of that, either," Harry answered, in dubious tones. "You remember Wordsworth's 'Phantom of Delight'? I'm not certain in my own mind that, in the end, the 'creature not too bright and good for human natures daily food', doesn't after all deserve best of humanity. It is such as those that seem always brightest to me 'with something of the angel-light,' as Wordsworth puts it."

They were treading dangerously near the edge of a precipice now. When a young man and a young woman begin to quote poetry together, the end is usually not far off. But they fluttered still, like a pair of eddying moths, about the edge of the candle, flitting forever round and round it, and trying hard, as young people will do, to go as near the flame as possible without actually singeing their wings in it.

Soon they turned out upon the open moorland. "How glorious the views are to-day!" Harry cried, with delight, sniffing in the breath of the golden gorse and the fainter perfume of the large Cornish heather. "A morning like this makes one feel the meaning of the joy of living! How the Moorland smiles at us from a thousand faces! How delight-

ful it is to come among so many old friends once more ! To my mind, there's no heath on earth one half so lovely as the Cornish heather."

"It only grows for a few miles just about here, you know," Olwen cried, delighted at the London doctor's praise of their local product.

"Yes ; Polperran has more than one rare flower of its own," Harry answered significantly, with a side glance at Olwen. Then he feared he had gone too far. He stooped and picked a little pinky-white bell, the autumnal scilla, to divert the thread of talk. "What a sweet little blossom, this one," he cried, admiring it ; "in shape, as graceful as an Etruscan vase ; in colour, as beautiful as—as an English maiden. I'm sure I can say nothing prettier than that."

Olwen pushed the brushes aside with her parasol timidly. "Indeed," she said, "in weather like this the world is very, very beautiful."

Harry smiled. "It needs no Columbus, Miss Tregellas," he muttered, half in irony, to "discover that continent. On such a summer day, I come out of town and go into the world, a regular optimist, to find it everywhere rich and glorious with varied beauty. The play seems to be in full swing, and we have front seats everywhere reserved for us. I love to watch it all as it works itself out—the rabbits twinkling off in haste to their burrows ; the larks tossing up their full hearts to the sky ; the very worms, and bees, and beetles all quick and instinct with the joy of living. The world wags on in its own quaint way, eating and drinking, and marrying and giving in marriage, by every lane, and moor, and hedgerow ; and I love to see it, and to feel myself one with it." And then, with the young blood still beating fuller and hotter than ever in his veins, he flew off half unconsciously into that vague, high-flown, poetical talk that first love kindles of itself in every one of us. The moorland was lovelier than its wont that morning, and Harry knew what it was that made it so. He talked on, half in rapsody and half in seriousness, of everything beautiful, or grand, or exquisite that met their eyes in that enchanted fairyland. He talked of the birds, and the beasts, and the flowers ; he talked of the ships, and the bay, and the ocean ; but most of all he talked, as young people always do talk in such special circumstances, of their own two selves, circling round and round that delicious central question for ever, yet never quite arriving at it.

"How beautifully you put things, Dr. Chichele," Olwen cried at last, admiring him. "Nobody else ever talks as you do."

Harry smiled. Her incense was grateful to him. He recognized that he was talking better than himself. He didn't know, however, that it wasn't he who was putting things so beautifully that cloudless morning ; but the hot young blood and the summer tide within him. At such times, to say the truth, a man talks better than his own nature. Harry Chichele knew he was in love ; but he didn't also know that what he called love was just one half selfish self-admiration only.

They had reached the summit of a seaward rock, looking down on the bay where the *Seamew* had foundered. Olwen rested for a moment against a weathered peak of bluff rock, by the side of a profound gorge cut out in the solid granite by the dashing waves. Below, lay a great

broken precipice, whose dark cliffs of hornblende and serpentine were crumbled above by wind and rain, and smoothed beneath by the ceaseless dashing of the winter waves. "See," Harry cried, pointing down to it with his hand. "Up to the limit of the breakers the hard rock shines down there like polished Egyptian syenite; but beyond that point it's all fissured by frost, and air, and rain, and storm, and covered over with its dappled coat of grey and silvery and yellow lichen."

"It's always like that in Cornwall," Olwen answered, looking up at him timidly. "You see it so, you know, in Brett's pictures."

"Yes," Harry went on. "I know it is; I know it. You can trace the origin of all these lovely little Cornish coves from small rills, just like this, which have worn themselves gorge-like valleys through the hard rock, or else from fissures which finally give rise to sea caves, like the one where Mohammad Ali and I rowed this morning for our early swim in the clear green water. The waves penetrate for a couple of hundred yards into the bowels of the rock, hemmed in by walls a roofs of dark serpentine, with interlacing veins of green and red. last, by constant dashing, they produce a blow-hole at the top; and the blow-hole communicates with the open air above; either because fissure crops up just there to the surface, or because the rain-water percolates and disintegrates the granite. Then, in process of time, the roof falls in; the boulders get washed away by the waves; and we find in the end a long and narrow cove like yours at Polperran, still bounded on either side by tall cliffs, whose summits the air and rainfall slowly wear away into your exquisite and fantastic Cornish pinnacles."

"But what makes the beautiful little islands," she asked, where the gulls and cormorants sit alone above the big waves upon their precipitous perches?" She longed to make him talk, he talked so wisely.

"Oh, that's just the slow action of the water, still," Harry answered airily; "always beating against the solid wall of crystalline rock." He paused a moment and glanced idly inland, and then again turned his eye seaward. "Do you know, Miss Tregellas," he began once more—it had trembled on his lips for a moment to call her Olwen, but he refrained for the time being out of pure reverence—"I like to think that all this loveliness has been produced by the sea, out of pure accident, on the barren moors of your Cornish uplands. Nothing, after all—could be flatter or more desolate than the level waste whose seaward escarpment gives rise to all your romantic coves and pyramidal islets. The wind and the waves carved out this coast into varied shapes by force of blind currents, working unseen in endless play on hidden veins of harder or of softer crystal. Isn't there some force like that at work upon our own lives somehow, which similarly at times takes all the dull prosaic details of our daily existence and moulds and informs them with some heavenly glory? Where have I read those lines, I wonder—

"The white and common daylight streaming through
Some rich cathedral window, dim with saints,
Falls on the clasped hand of some stony knight
In palpitating crimson?"

They were quivering upon the very verge of the precipice now. Olwen prevented the fatal plunge once more by a momentary silence, which she broke by saying in a very different tone, "What on earth can the boys be doing down there by the cove, I wonder?"

"They're throwing stones at something in the water," Harry answered carelessly, not over-pleased at the diversion she had given to their talk. "Upon my word, now I come to think of it, I believe it must be the masts of the *Seamew*."

He drew his little field-glass from its case at his side, and focussed it straight on the suspected object. "The young fiends!" he exclaimed at last angrily. "It is the *Seamew*, as clear as day. And what do you think those little brutes are doing? The masts are standing up above the water's edge just where she sank, and the rats have clustered on the top of the rigging, and these young wretches are positively stoning the poor terrified creatures. How needlessly cruel!—and how perfectly English! On a spring morning, the French always declare, your Englishman rises and says to himself, 'It's a fine day; let's all go out and kill something.' As you and I are walking along the moor here together, our hearts full of the delight of summer, and sympathy with the beasts and birds and living things, discoursing as we go of the joy of living, these abominable little wretches are amusing themselves with trying to maim the terror-stricken rats who are clinging for dear life in their last despair to the tops of the rigging. I've been too near drowning at sea myself not to know what that means. A doctor's business is to save life. We must go down at once and save these poor mute fugitives."

They scrambled down the steep pathway by the little rill to the white beach, where Harry's boat, which he hired for the bathing, lay drawn up on the sand by the little side cove. Harry pushed it down by main force to the sea, and rowed with the hot speed of fiery indignation to the masts of the *Seamew*, just overtopping the summer ripple. The boys, astonished and surprised, ceased their bombardment of stones as the strange gentleman from London approached the wreck. There, some eight or ten rats, with the curious instinct of their kind, had climbed their way up from the hold to the royals, and crouched together in abject fear, one beside the other, huddled together in that doubtful situation. Harry Chichele, with incautious haste, put out his hand to seize the foremost. The frightened brute, always savage by nature, and now alarmed beyond its wont by the cannonade of stones, unable to distinguish friend from foe, made a fierce dash at his well-meaning hand, and gashed his thumb deeply with its projecting incisors. Harry withdrew his hand in haste, and bound round the bleeding wound hurriedly with his pocket-handkerchief. Then, with the imperturbable good humour of his profession, he made a sudden dash once more at the nape of the offending animal's neck, and, before it had time to recover from its breathless surprise, dropped it like a kitten on the floor of the dingy.

The other rats, with the usual sagacity of ratkind, having watched this incident with profound interest, and satisfied themselves, in their

own wise heads, that no immediate harm of any sort had come to their comrade, suffered Harry to lift them quietly, one by one, from the rigging into the dingey without resistance ; and, as he rowed back again from the shore, the great brown beasts grouped themselves expectant in the bows of the boat, waiting, all alert, for the very first chance of landing. As the dingey touched the shore with her bows, with one accord they leaped out wildly on to the shingle, and without so much as waiting to thank their benefactor, scampered away at the top of their speed for the friendly shelter of the bracken and underbrush.

Harry pulled the boat up by himself on to the beach, while Olwen, looking with unconcealed anxiety at his wounded hand, inquired, in an eager and timid tone, whether the rat had seriously hurt it.

"Oh no," Harry answered, with an unconcerned smile, unwinding the handkerchief and bathing the wound with fresh water from the little rill that flowed down the broken chine to form the cove. "It's nothing—nothing. Please don't talk about it. Perhaps you would kindly bind it up for me."

Olwen, who knew well how to make a surgical bandage, took the handkerchief he offered her, delighted with the chance of making herself useful to him, and wound it round the wounded part with native dexterity. "You don't think," she said, with an evident anxiety which flattered Harry's sense of self-importance, "that a bite from a creature, mad with terror like that, would be really serious and dangerous, do you? Not like a rabid animal's, for example?"

Harry laughed off the suggestion lightly. It is so delightful to be made much of. "Oh, dear no," he said ; "it's quite unimportant. Medical men are accustomed to these small injuries. It'll be all right again to-morrow morning."

Olwen walked on beside him for a while in silence. Presently she gave a timid glance once more into his handsome face. "Dr. Chichele," she said with some hesitation, "I know it's awfully nervous, awfully stupid of me ; but could that rat possibly have got—germs, or anything like that,—connected with the cholera about him anyhow?"

Harry's heart leaped up at the suggestion. How sweet that she should thus be ferreting out for herself, as it were, every possible source of danger for him. "Oh, dear no," he answered, with perfect confidence. "Dismiss the idea at once from your mind, I beg of you. The wound's nothing at all to speak of. It'll heal, in my present vigorous condition of health, in less than no time. But it's very kind indeed of you, Miss Tregellas, to take so much personal interest in the matter."

Olwen blushed, and wondered vaguely in her own heart whether she had said too much. They walked on a little further, still without speaking. Then Harry paused and said suddenly, aloud, but as if to himself, "I'm sorry I let those rats go, after all. I might have kept them and given them to the Begum."

"Give them to whom?" Olwen asked, in wonder. A rat would be such an incomprehensible present.

"Oh, nothing," Harry answered, evasively, recollecting himself.

He didn't care to speak about the snake to Olwen. Snakes are such very uncanny possessions. "But, perhaps,"—he ransacked his brains for an excuse—"perhaps it wasn't exactly right of me to let them go as I did among the farmers' corn and gardens."

As they walked in at the rectory gate on their return from their stroll, Mohammad Ali, seated on the garden chair beside Ivan Royle, scanned them both closely with his keen and piercing oriental scrutiny.

"They've been talking a great deal to one another," he muttered, half aloud; "but, thank heaven! the man hasn't yet proposed to her."

Ivan Royle lifted his eyes in hasty inquiry. They met Mohammad Ali's full in front for a single second. Once more the same little pantomime went on as before with Harry. Then Ivan looked down again, hot and red, at his drawing. In that indivisible point of time the two men had read one another's ideas aright. They said nothing, but rose and moved to the house together.

They were all three in love at once with Olwen Tregellas, each man after his own fashion.

CHAPTER VII.

As Ivan Royle sat sketching in the garden again the morning after, while Mohammad Ali leaned back with Eastern indolence in the easy chair beside him, puffing a cigarette between his pearl-white teeth, the Englishman suddenly looked up with a curious glance from his piece of work, and said abruptly, without preface or apology, "Ali, why on earth did you say that yesterday?"

"Say what?" the Indian asked, with pretended unconsciousness, though he knew perfectly well in his own mind to what Ivan alluded.

"Say, 'Thank heaven he hasn't yet proposed to her,'" the artist continued quietly.

Mohammad Ali held his peace for a moment. Then he flung away the end of his cigarette with petulant haste, raised himself on his elbows in the easy chair, and leaned across nearer to Ivan.

"Because I don't want Harry Chichele to mar that divine being's beautiful life for her," he answered softly, almost whispering.

Ivan started. He pretended for a moment to trifle with his lights and shades. "Why not?" he asked presently, with a furtive look sideways at Ali.

"Because *you* would make her a far better husband, Royle," Mohammad Ali answered incisively, after a short pause.

The words were said with an evident struggle. They took Ivan Royle quite by surprise. "*Me?*" he cried. "*Me*, did you say? Why *me*? Why should you think of me at all in the matter, Ali?"

"Because, Royle, I know you love her."

"You know I love her! But——" And he hesitated.

"Yes. What? Don't be afraid. Who am I? A poor black! I

don't count. You needn't be nervous before me. What is it? Tell me! Tell me all about it!"

"But, Ali—I thought—you, too—admired her."

Mohammad Ali leaned back in his chair with a pained face, and clenched his fists hard and tight together. "Admire her!" he cried. "I adore her! I worship her! I kiss the very ground she walks upon! She is to me a divine creature! Royle, I would die for her! I would give my life up to make her happy."

"And yet——"

"And yet I want to see you marry her. Yes, I do. I spoke the truth to you. Is that too deep for your sober, matter-of-fact English brain! It's not too deep for the inferior intelligence of the mere unsophisticated natural black man. I admire and respect and worship that heavenly apparition far too profoundly ever to let her know herself the feeling I bear towards her."

The Englishman looked at him with searching eyes. "That—that is very noble of you, Ali," he answered at last.

Mohammad Ali's lip quivered a little. "You know what one of yourselves, a poet of your own, has written," he murmured. "'My spirit is too deeply laden ever to burden thine.' A black man, of course, has no right to love her. But he may at least keep his love to himself; he may feel for her in silence that 'devotion to something afar from the sphere of his sorrow,' that Shelley talks about."

Ivan Royle's fingers trembled visibly on the sheet of paper. "I can forgive you, Ali," he said. "It's very natural. No man on earth could ever see her and not fall in love with her."

"Not even a black man," the Mussulman assented fervently.

"But, Ali, why do you want *me* to marry her?"

"Because," Ali answered, "I watched you here all these days—oh, so closely—you don't know how closely—no Englishman could ever watch as we do; as the cat watches the mouse's hole, so we Easterns watch people—and I see you're a good man and true; a man who would try to make her happy."

"But why do you think, then, that Chichele wouldn't also? You and he have been old friends. Why do you back me against him, as it were! Why did you say, 'Thank heaven!' yesterday?"

Mohammad Ali paused and deliberated. "Royle," he said at last, with a burst of confidence, "you're a genuine fellow, a good man and true, I do believe. I'll tell you all I know. It may be the merest prejudice on my part. Heaven knows we're all of us one mass of prejudices, black people and white people all alike; there isn't much to choose between us. But I feel the prejudice and I won't deny it. Did you ever hear of Begum Johanna of Deoband?"

Ivan shook his head decidedly. "You mentioned her once the other day," he said. "But what on earth has Begum Johanna of Deoband got to do with this question between myself and Chichele?"

"Listen first, while I tell you her story," Mohammad Ali interposed with oriental gravity. And then, in his quiet Arab fashion, he told Ivan at full length the episode of the slave girl, very much as he had

told it to Harry Chichele himself on the morning of his first arrival at Polperran.

Ivan listened with curious interest as the Indian retailed to him that ghastly tale of incredible Eastern cruelty and barbarism. When Ali had finished, he asked in a puzzled way, "But what on earth has all this to do, my dear fellow, with me and Chichele? What connection has he with your people in India?"

Mohammad Ali looked him hard in the face. He answered slowly and very distinctly, growing hot in the cheeks with surprise and horror, "My people, did you say, Royle? My people? My people? No, no, my dear friend; I have neither scot nor lot with Hindoos like that—me, a genuine freeborn Arab of the Arabs. *His* people, you mean; his people, it is rather. For Harry Chichele, white as he looks, is a lineal descendant in the fourth degree of Begum Johanna, who buried alive the slave girl."

"Impossible!" Ivan exclaimed, laying down his brush in his surprise and incredulity. "The Chicheles are a well-known Anglo-Indian family; and Harry's grandmother was one of the Peytons of Yorkshire, he tells me—a daughter, you know, of Lord St. Maurice's."

"Exactly," Mohammad Ali went on, with merciless precision. "His grandmother, as you say, was one of the Peytons of Yorkshire. And the Peytons sold themselves, body and soul, for Begum Johanna's broad gold mohurs. This is just how it all happened—you can look it up for yourself, if you choose, in the 'Peerage.' Begum Johanna's husband—let us call him, for convenience sake, her husband—was a certain adventurer of the name of K rouac, a Breton Frenchman, a sailor by trade, and a soldier of fortune by predilection; and it was he who founded the estate of Deoband. Now, the Begum had a son by him, one Philippe K rouac, a half-caste of course, neither one thing nor the other, who inherited his mother's vast fortune, worth eighty thousand sterling a year if it was worth a penny. This Philippe K rouac was educated in England, and married there. He had one daughter, Philippa Pindi, whom he called after her father and grandmother; for though the Begum at her conversion (I hope I use the correct expression) was baptized as Johanna, her native name was first Pindi. Well, Lord St. Maurice's eldest son married our friend, Philippa Pindi de K rouac—it had grown to an aristocratic *de* by that time, if you please—and with her all the estate of Deoband. Or rather, he married the estate of Deoband, encumbered as it was with the awkward necessity for taking a brown-skinned half-caste Miss de K rouac into the bargain. And that's how Harry Chichele, white as he looks, comes to be lineally descended in the fourth degree from that unspeakable woman, Begum Johanna."

"I see," Ivan Royle answered slowly. "But surely, Ali, you don't mean to say you distrust Harry Chichele merely—merely because he has in his veins some trifling fraction of the blood of your own people?"

Mohammad Ali started aghast once more. "My own people," he cried, half angrily. "Again you say my own people! No, no. Thank

heaven, no drop of that fearful woman's accursed blood flows in one vein of mine, my dear fellow."

"Well, Ali, I confess for my part I'd rather not be descended from that dreadful Begum of yours."

"That Begum of mine! Again you repeat it! How you persist in your national error! You mean that Begum of yours and of Harry Chichele's! After all, the Begum was Hindoo by birth and Christian by religion—your own Aryan sister in race, while I am pure unadulterated Semite. We, who are Moslems of the old rock in the North-West Provinces, we have nothing to do with either Hindoos or Christians. We have lived among the heathen for twenty generations, exactly as the Jews have lived among you English, intermarrying only with our own stock, and keeping ourselves as separate still in blood as in religion. And just as the Jews are better than the English, so do we Moslems flatter ourselves in our own hearts we are of better blood than the heathen Hindoos who live around us."

Ivan paused irresolute a moment; then he said, "But, Ali, have you any more definite reason than that to give for distrusting Chichele?"

"Well," Mohammad Ali answered, "I've known Chichele for a good many years now, and till lately I've always thought I liked him immensely. But the way you regard a man undergoes a decided change, of course, when you think—when you think what effect his life would have upon the life of a woman whom you respect and honour with all the force and energy of your nature. Of late it has often occurred to me, I confess, that Harry Chichele has two sides—an English side, and a side derived from his ancestress, the Begum. It's perfectly well known in India that every one of that terrible woman's descendants, of whatever race, down to the third and fourth generation, is as cold as steel and as cruel as a tiger. Now there's a certain keen, cold, scientific deliberateness about much Harry Chichele does, that sometimes makes me tremble for the happiness of any woman who might have to pass her life tied up to him. Harry Chichele is good enough and pleasant enough in his own way to make a friend of; he isn't good enough, if you ask me that, to entrust with the keeping of Miss Tregellas's entire future."

"Ali," the young Englishman said with a sudden impulse, "I'm glad you say so, for I've half fancied it once or twice myself; and then I've been ashamed of myself for even fancying it, after all that you and he have done together for me. I've said to myself, 'Is it only my own selfish feeling that makes me think I would make that beautiful pure woman a better husband than Harry Chichele?' I've hesitated and doubted in my own mind whether it wouldn't be a mean and wicked action on my part to try and win her if—if, as I thought, he wished to marry her. For one thing, I said to myself, wasn't it ungrateful of me; for another thing, I said, could I ever do as much for her in life as he could do. And then I imagined I saw in him underlying signs of a cruel, hard, cold disposition, and I was angry with myself for venturing to see them, lest I should be doing the man a real injustice."

Ali spoke with singular earnestness. "Harry Chichele's a very good

fellow in his way," he said; "but heaven forbid, while you and I live, he should ever marry Olwen Tregellas. I ought to have spoken to you sooner about it. I was wrong to wait, out of foolish shrinking. May Allah grant it isn't now too late! Royle, Royle, for that good woman's dear sake, you must try to save her from Harry Chichele."

There was a long pause, which Ivan broke at last by saying abruptly, "Ali, you're a better man after all, ten thousand times, than either of us! The utter way you sink yourself and your own hope in this matter makes me feel ashamed of my dreadful selfishness."

Mohammad Ali smiled a bitter smile. "My dear fellow," he answered, with a feeble attempt at forced gaiety, "I deserve no credit at all for that. Kismet: it is fated. No other course is possibly open to me. It's all that destiny about which I spoke to you. I admire and respect Miss Tregellas immensely. Her happiness is to me a matter of great moment. I would give my very eyes, if I could, to serve her. I fear and mistrust Harry Chichele. I don't want to see her make over her precious life to his tender mercies. I recognize you as a better, a truer, and a gentler man. I would like to see you, therefore, make her happy. For myself, who and what am I? A blank! A nobody! A nothing! A cypher! Why are we two talking together as we do talk together now? Because I am a black man, while you are a white one. Otherwise, the thing would be impossible. Could you have talked so with any white man? Never, never? Why can you unburden yourself so to me? Why can I unburden myself so to you? Because we both know in our own hearts that, so far as Miss Tregellas or any other Englishwoman is concerned, a man of my colour is no man at all, but a thing, a being, an abstract conception. Look at me, Royle. I'll tell you the whole simple truth. I love that beautiful divine apparition with all the profoundest love of which my nature is capable. Well, then, it's my plain duty—never while she lives to let her know it. The knowledge of it could only distress her. Why should I hurt her tender heart by allowing it to see the scars on mine? I have but one thought for her—to make her happy. I fear and tremble for her if she accepts Chichele. Won't you trust your own heart, man, and step in between them in time to save her?"

"Ali," the Englishman cried, "you are too good, you are too noble, you are too generous, you are too chivalrous! I wish I was half such a fellow as you are! In my love there is too much selfishness. Yours seems to be all pure devotion."

Mohammad Ali smiled sadly again. "It's easy to be generous and chivalrous, my friend," he said, "when you are only a black man. If I were white as you are to-day, Royle, I would speak for myself. I would speak quite otherwise. As it is, I have only one desire—to make Miss Tregellas's life happy. I really believe you are worthy of her. I really doubt Harry Chichele. What else can I do but act upon my belief? Don't lose another moment, I beg of you. For her own sake as well as for yours, don't let Chichele carry her off undefended."

"But, Ali, am I fit for her? Am I good enough? Am I worthy of her?"

Mohammad Ali looked hard at him. "No man is worthy of her," he said shortly. "No man deserves her. No man is good enough. But you will do as well as another, and a great deal better than Harry Chichele. If I did not think so, I would not have spoken to you."

CHAPTER VIII.

THAT evening Ivan Royle had tea in the garden for the first time with the rest of the party. After tea, the three men wandered off upon the moor together, the rector wishing to show Harry and Ali a remarkable logan-stone, and Ivan and Olwen were left alone for a while in the garden.

Ivan had never before seen the beautiful Cornish girl look so purely beautiful as she did that evening. Evidently Olwen was at her best, and she blushed and dropped her eyes from time to time in a delicious way that made her even more bewitchingly pretty than ever.

"You seem yourself this evening," the young painter began tentatively. "I don't think I've seen you look so well and happy ever since we came to Polperran to bring you trouble."

"Perhaps," Olwen said, a little archly, "that's because you're getting better."

Ivan was pleased. So small a thing pleases us in those supreme moments of a lifetime. "Miss Tregellas, will you do me a great favour? Will you let me sketch you just as you stand there?"

Olwen laughed a merry little laugh. "As you please," she said. "But what will you do with it? Will you send me in, full length, to the Academy? How funny it'd look to see one's self there, stuck up on the walls for everybody to gaze at—'Portrait of a Lady!'"

"I shall send it to the Academy," Ivan answered, quite seriously, arranging his easel; "and, if I do my sitter anything like justice, it ought to attract immense attention."

"Why, now, Mr. Royle you're really convalescent. You're beginning to say pretty things to me."

Ivan Royle looked up at her with admiring eyes. He had fixed his canvas straight upon the little easel, and was sketching in the beautiful outlines of that graceful figure. He worked rapidly and with practised deftness. Olwen looked back at him and smiled in return. He had never seen her so frank and engaging as she was that evening. She seemed to have forgotten her usual girlish, blushing timidity, and to treat him more with cordial unreserve as she might have treated her own brother.

Olwen kept her place opposite him exactly as he had posed her, and watched him steadily as his hand ran free in easy curves over his square of canvas. The young painter went on with his work for a while in

silence ; then, with an irresistible impulse, he laid down the brush and came over to her quite suddenly. "Miss Tregellas," he said, without any preface, his voice trembling slightly as he spoke ; "you have saved my life. Will you make it happy for ever by sharing it ?"

Olwen drew back, astonished at his abruptness. She looked up into his handsome face with wondering surprise. This was indeed an attempt to carry her by storm. "Mr. Royle," she said, simply, "I didn't know you meant that. Oh no ; I cannot, I cannot."

Ivan Royle looked her back in the face with unspoken inquiry in the depths of his deep, earnest, blue eyes. Olwen had never noticed before how deep, and true, and gentle those eyes were. She shrank a little before them ; they seemed to look her through and through, with some infinite yearning—so tenderly and so profoundly. "Why not ?" he asked, in the same soft voice. "Have I been too precipitate only, or is there—is there some other reason ?"

Olwen raised her eyes once more till they met his. She hardly dared to look him in the face and answer him back. "There is another reason," she whispered at last very softly.

Ivan spoke not another word. Her eyes had told him plainly what it was. He saw it ; he knew it. Harry Chichele had been beforehand with him.

He let his hand drop idly by his side. The gesture was full of unspoken despondency. His eyes for a moment grew very dim. "Miss Tregellas," he said, "I'm truly sorry for it. But if it is so, I dare not regret it. I hope it's for the best for you. Forgive my audacity. Forget what I have said. I hope we may still be friends always."

Olwen raised her eyes once more, with timid lashes, and met the young man's fully and frankly, "We shall be friends always," she answered, taking his hands with not unwomanly kindness. "I feel I have a sort of right in you now. Don't let this mistake come up as a shadow between us. I shall always remember with pleasure the happy time we have all spent here this year together."

"Thank you," Ivan said simply, pressing her hand in his like a friend's. "It's very good of you indeed to say so. It was presumptuous of me ever to have hoped as I did ; but a man will sometimes hope presumptuously. Let us not say a word more about it. You will give me your friendship, you say. That alone is more than I dare ask ; I shall prize it above everything, absolutely everything, that any one else could ever give me."

Olwen stood still half irresolute on the lawn, holding his hand even yet in hers. She knew that she ought to leave him at once—that any other girl would instantly leave him ; and yet she could not bear in her heart to do it. He had been so ill, and he seemed so sorry. She stood and looked at him irresolutely again and again.

Why did she wait there ? Why did she not go ? Why did she trifle with the poor young painter ? Olwen Tregellas fancied herself in love with Harry Chichele—the fluent talker, the clever admirer. In that belief she had that morning answered an almost inaudible "Yes" to his ardent questioning. As she faced Ivan Royle there now on the

lawn, she did not know—even she herself—that the beating of her heart told her that she had answered the wrong person.

And yet she could not choose but stop. Some invisible power that she knew not of compelled her to wait against her will and linger on the lawn. She roused herself at last from her strange reverie, and dropped the painter's hand as if half guilty, "Let us go on with the picture," she said softly.

Ivan Royle, recalled to himself by the word and action, took up his brush again, and began in some half-hearted mechanical way to pretend acquiescence with her strange command. How odd of her to wish him to go on at present! At first he could not fix his mind upon the picture. But after a while, as he looked again and again at that pure, sweet face, the light in Olwen's eyes burned so bright, and the colour in her cheeks came and went so daintily, that he could not help himself from getting interested at last, and hastily painting in the whole face—just as it had rejected him. He was glad, now, she had asked him to do it. He wanted to keep it for a memento of Olwen.

He stopped there painting, with fiery energy, till the light failed, and the shades of evening began to draw in round the rectory garden. Then he brought in his easel on his arm to the verandah, and took a seat under the broad roof outside the open drawing-room window. But still Olwen did not go away. She sat on the verandah, and looked out into the evening, waiting for her father and the two young men to return from the logan-stone. There was a certain unwonted pensiveness in her tone, she knew not why. She was very sorry for Ivan Royle. Poor fellow! She began to see now how deeply he was grieved. She began to see it, and for his sake she regretted it bitterly.

If she had only had two hearts to give, she could have given one of them then to Ivan.

As for Ivan, he sat there as in a dream, realizing to himself for the first time in his life that this beautiful girl, whom he had barely known for a fortnight yet, was henceforth and for ever a component element in his being and his happiness. He could understand Mohammad Ali better now. Henceforth he, too, must live for one object—to make Olwen Tregellas happy.

By-and-by voices sounded at the gate, and the rector and the two young men strolled lightly up the little avenue. Harry Chichele and Ali joined the silent couple on the verandah. "What! sitting out in the twilight," Harry cried half banteringly in his cheery voice, already with the very tone of assured possession. "How delightfully romantic. And with the moon rising behind the clouds too. What a lucky fellow you are, Royle. And what have you been doing this afternoon? Sketching Miss Tregellas, I do declare! Oh, let me see it. Why, my dear fellow, this is just magnificent! You must finish this. It's gloriously begun. We haven't seen you do anything one half so good. Your flesh tones are simply splendid. Figure must be your forte. Why do you go and waste yourself on landscape?"

"Perhaps," Ivan said, smiling regretfully, "the subject inspired me."

Harry darted a quick glance at him as he stood, somewhat dejected, by the shadowy sketch, with his brush in his hand. "And well it might," he answered quickly, as Olwen, blushing, pretended to busy herself with a rose from the verandah. "This is a beautiful picture. You must finish it in detail. And you must let me have it when it's all done, Royle. I shall buy it to begin my collection."

Ivan glanced back at him a trifle coldly, not to say haughtily. "I have begun it for myself," he answered, with a forced smile. "An artist is not a common huckster. I want to keep it as a memento of Polperran. But if Miss Tregellas would like it herself, of course, that's quite another matter. I shall be happy to give it to her, and paint myself a replica from the original as soon as it's completed."

Mohammad Ali, glowering from behind, said nothing, but stood in the background with his impenetrable oriental eyes fixed steadily in a keen gaze upon the three chief actors. He was scanning them all with that close and cat-like Eastern scrutiny of which he had himself spoken to Ivan. Presently Olwen pulled out her watch, and rose with a start. "I shall be late for dinner, if I don't make haste," she said simply.

Harry went up to his own room, too, and Ivan and the Mussulman were left alone in the twilight under the verandah.

As soon as they were by themselves Mohammad Ali came up like a shadow to his new friend's side, and passing his arm through his with silent sympathy, led him gently and unresistingly into the drawing-room. Then he sat down beside him on the sofa in the corner, and said, in his soft, quiet voice, instinct with all a woman's delicate feeling, "My dear, dear fellow, I'm very sorry. For your sake, I'm unfeignedly sorry; but for *hers*—for *hers*—ten thousand times more so."

"Why, how do you know it all?" Ivan cried, in surprise.

Mohammad Ali smiled a profound smile of oriental inscrutability. "Have I not eyes?" he answered with a shrug. "Have I not ears? Have I not senses? Do I not know all—all that has happened? I have read it on the open book of your three faces—English faces, easy to read as a church clock or a flaring advertisement. This evening, while Harry Chichele and I were out, you asked Miss Tregellas—asked her boldly. And Miss Tregellas told you in her frank way she could not be yours, kindly, but decidedly. And you asked her why: and she answered you at once, or, at least, she let you know by acquiescent silence, that she'd accepted Harry Chichele this very morning. And then Miss Tregellas, instead of going away, stopped on the lawn, and you went on painting her picture for all that, for very love of her. And you painted it well, because you loved her; a last regretful memento of Polperran. Is that not so? Eh, my patient? Have I not correctly read the symptoms?"

"It is so," Ivan answered with a quiet sigh. "You have read them only too correctly."

"But I can tell you more than that," the Indian went on, with flashing eyes and an almost excited air that was very different from his usual passivity. "I can tell you something that you yourself do not know—that even Miss Tregellas, in her own soul has never guessed at. I only know it—I alone. Miss Tregellas loves you."

"Oh no," Ivan cried, with a sudden gesture of profound dissent. "You're wrong there, Ali. If she did, she would never have accepted Chichele's proposal."

The Indian smiled his calm smile of Eastern superiority once more. "I said, she did not know it herself," he answered. "If she knew it, she would not have taken him. But many a woman misinterprets her own mind. The heart speaks often a foreign language. If I read her right, Royle, I tell you for a truth it is you she loves--you, not Chichele. She has made a fatal, fatal error. But it may not yet be too late to correct it."

CHAPTER IX.

Two months had come and gone, and a November fog with its black pall had taken possession of the heart of London. In the top room of a wretched lodging-house tenement in Marylebone, a girl of twelve sat by herself late at night on a rough wooden box, which did duty at once for chair and cupboard. It was an unplanned deal box, that had once held coarse bars of soap at the neighbouring grocer's; and with the trifling exception of a bundle of rags in the far corner, regarded for practical purposes as a bed, it formed the whole and sole furniture of that miserable attic. A cheap candle, stuck in an old ink-bottle on the floor by the bedside, diffused a darkness visible through the vile room. The one window was broken and stuffed with brown paper; the floor lay bare and littered with bits of broken glass; and the last remnants of the afternoon's rain still dripped slowly, drop by drop, through the joints in the loose tiles, into a tin pan of very dirty water. An open staircase led up to the attic from below; the noise of oaths and quarrelling resounded dimly from the other apartments of the wretched lodging-house.

The girl herself, though she would have given her age, if asked, as "going thirteen," had a face that might easily have passed for thirty, and a stumpy, stunted, undeveloped little body that would have done scanty justice to ten years old. Her poor small hands were thin and skinny, her matted hair appeared never to have made acquaintance with the domestic comb, and the tattered clothes that hardly covered her sharp angular little limbs and wizened bones were full of holes, and wretchedly insufficient in number and thickness. The child crouched almost double on the box, and gnawed her nails hungrily as she crouched, perhaps, because she had nothing else in particular then, or generally, to exercise her teeth upon.

For a long time the unhappy little atom sat there in silence, brooding to herself over Heaven knows what awful childish vagaries, and never stirring or moving on her hard seat for a single moment. At last, the bundle of clothes in the corner quivered and shook, and the child turned sharply round at the rustle, with the precocious alert attention

of children who know that a savage blow is the sure result of a passing second's dereliction of duty.

A woman's head and arm raised themselves feebly above the bundle of rags. It was a face of the most horrible bloated description—one of those puffy, crimson faces out of which the very semblance of our common humanity seems to have been pounded long ago by drink and ill-usage. It had no distinct features to speak of; frequent smashing had reduced them all by gradual stages to a general livid, pulpy equality. A few old scars diversified the otherwise regular surface; but for those, the whole face consisted just of one raw red mass, with little pig's eyes half obliterated by the swollen eyelids, and a feeble mouth that opened slowly whenever it spoke, in slobbering stupidity. Nevertheless, the voice, though hoarse, was still powerful and rasping; it dealt in tones of angry command, and in the vilest variety of low London accent.

"Where did you put the gin, Lizbeth?" the voice asked, with loud querulousness, as the puffy red hand fumbled round and round on the floor close by, groping eagerly after the expected bottle.

The child raised her head to reply. "Put it away where you can't get none, mother," she said. "You ain't to 'ave no more gin. It's the gin as is a-killing of you."

The woman made no immediate answer. She groped around still with her hand, till she came at last upon some solid object. It was the old ink-bottle, that served the office of candlestick. She took out the candle with tremulous fingers, and held it shakily in her left hand. Then, raising herself with an effort, in her bundle of rags, and balancing the empty earthenware bottle dexterously in her right, she flung it across the room with all her force, and with deliberate aim at the shrinking child's unhappy head.

The girl made no attempt in any way to shirk or dodge it. She knew too well the consequences of defending herself. She simply crouched closer than ever, and let the frightful missile hit her on the temple above the left ear with a blow that rang through the whole unsteady attic. In a moment the blood flowed freely from the wound, and the child, half-stunned and sobbing to herself, held up the nearest rag of her clothes to staunch the bleeding.

"That warned you up, I bet, anyways," the woman cried hoarsely from the bed of rags. "That'll learn you for to disobey your mother another time, image. 'Old that row, and git me the gin, will yer? If you don't, I'll rise up from the bed, as sick as I am—blowed if I won't—and break every precious bone in your cursed body!"

Lizbeth rose, sobbing at the word, and crawled slowly across to the bed, the wound on her head still bleeding profusely.

"Bring me that there candlestick," the woman said, aiming a savage blow at her cowering daughter.

The child went once more and fetched the bottle, with blood and hair still sticking in a clot to its sharp angle.

Somewhat appeased by this prompt obedience, the mother replaced the candle in its impromptu socket, and said again, in her querulous tone, "Git me the gin, Lizbeth."

Lizbeth trembled, but went across the room, and produced the bottle from a hole in the wall, where the lath and plaster had peeled off, and formed a natural cave, or cupboard.

The woman took the bottle lovingly in her bloated hands, poured out a couple of wineglassfuls of raw spirits into the tin mug that Lizbeth handed her, and drained it off at a single gulp, without one drop of water to qualify its fiery flavour.

"There," she said, mollified, as she finished her drink, "that does me more good than nothink. That warms up the 'eart and the inwards, that does. There's no medicine like a drop of Old Tom. 'Eaven's best gift, I calls it. It's all good alike, in 'ealth or in sickness."

And she dozed off gradually in a drunken sleep, while poor little Lizbeth, relieved for the moment, crept off to her box and mounted guard there, silent as before, with her wounded scalp still sore and bleeding.

By-and-by, a neighbour's head popped above the floor at the open staircase—a frizzy red head, adorned with endless twists of unkempt carrotty hair, and a good-natured Irishwoman's face smiling broad beneath them.

"An' how is she now, honey?" the good-natured Irishwoman asked in a loud whisper. "Is it dhrunk she is agin, thin! Och, more's the pity! The dhrink'll be the death of her, anyway. An' how do you think she does the night now?"

"She's awful bad," Lizbeth murmured low. "The fever's took her worse'n ever. I don't know as she can live long." And the child began to sob afresh, as if her little heart would break.

"Och, don't cry, thin, darlint," the Irishwoman said, advancing a step up the open staircase. "Sure, an' she'll get better, niver fear. She's not the koind that's given to dying. Why, whatever ails your poor head, thin? She'll not be afther sthriking ye wid the bottle, will she?"

"Oh, don't, Mrs. Flynn!" the child cried piteously. "Don't you touch it. It's that painful. Poor dear, she took an' threw that bottle at me."

Mrs. Flynn examined the wound carefully, and washed it as well as she was able in her existing state—having herself partaken of a dhrup of the craytur—with the dirty water in the tin pan. She washed it twice, and dressed it roughly with a wet rag. Then, nodding farewell to the little sentinel, with a good-humoured smile, and many exhortations not to take on about it (as if these things must be expected everywhere in the course of nature), she disappeared down the steep steps again, and left Lizbeth once more alone with her own reflections.

It was half an hour later when a man's step was heard on the stairs—a heavy step, with hobnailed boots—and a loud voice gave out a bold street cry, sung in swinging measure to a curious monotonous lilting sing-song.

"Penny-wink, penny-wink, penny-wink, oh! Take a pin; stick him in; turn him round; pull him out; penny-wink, penny-wink, penny-wink, oh!"

It was a jovial, rollicking, brutal voice, and it resounded like a hearty uproarious echo through the broken walls and tumbledown corridors of that neglected human piggery. A minute later, a head and shoulders hove in sight above the open top of the staircase, with a wooden tray poised in very unstable equilibrium above, and covered by a few dozen remaining periwinkles. The man whom these appurtenances belonged was coarse and large, and florid and brutal-looking, a perfect type of the burly blackguard of low London slums. He was considerably drunk into the bargain, and he reeled into that miserable attic room, with a rough air of besotted good fellowship that seemed badly out of place with the starved and utterly woe-begone condition of the poor little skinny waif who sat there cowering and crouching to receive him.

"Well, Lizbeth," the man growled out, flinging her a small piece of stale bread from his pocket as one might fling a bone to a street dog. "'Ow's Sal? Fever took her off? Wot's she up to? Dead yet? eh, gal?"

The child gnawed the dirty crust eagerly, as a dog might gnaw it, and answered with her mouth full of dry bread, "She's awful bad, father. She've took more gin, she 'ave."

"She's a sight of a long time dying, anyhow, confound her!" the man grumbled, laying down his tray, and stirring the animated bundle of rags in the corner with his foot, as if it had been a mere lifeless object.

The woman opened her eyes once more sleepily, and sat up in her rags. "Well, Bill," she said in a husky voice, "you've come home to see me die, 'ave yer?"

Bill stirred her up a second time with his thick boot. "Plaguey long time you take about it, anyways, missus," he muttered in a sulky tone. "'Wot's the good o' wastin' one's 'ard earned money on a woman like you? If you was worth anything, you'd ought to died a clear week ago."

"'Ow's trade?" Lizbeth interposed quite seriously.

"Trade's bad," her father responded with good-humoured pessimism. "This 'ere depression's told on the winkle business; 'ardly earn enough to get a man a drink. Where's the gin, Lizbeth? 'And me over the bottle!"

Lizbeth handed it over as ordered, and retired once more to her station on the box.

"Who's been a-drinking like this 'ere?" the man cried angrily, regarding the bottle held up to the light, and marking with his thumb the height of the spirit. "Lizbeth, why do yer go an' let 'er 'ave it? Wot's the use of me keepin' yer and feedin' yer like a fightin' cock if you don't exercise some kind of authority about the 'ouse? You good-for-nothink varmint, why do you go an' let 'er 'ave it, drat yer? Wot do you mean by it, eh, girl? eh, girl? Wot do yer mean by it?"

He emphasized each of these hasty questions in his own way by pulling the poor child's thin red ears, and cuffing her cheek at each clause of his repeated inquiry. Lizbeth sobbed and showed her head. "She

made me give it 'er," she answered, cowering. "She throwed the bottle at me and cut my 'ead open."

Her father turned in drunken indignation, half real, half humorous, to the bed where the sick woman lay. "Oh, you're a pretty one," he cried in a tone of dogged and brutal good-humour, draining off a mugful of the gin as he spoke. "You're a beauty, you are, an' no mistake, missus, to go treatin' your own flesh and blood, an' my daughter that way ! But I'll larn you for to meddle with my child ; oh yes, I will ! I'll do for yer ! I'll murder yer, Sal, you see if I don't ! Pretty sort of a wife you are, lyin' at 'ome 'ere, lazy in bed, for a 'ard-workin' British workin'-man in the penny-winkle business ! But I'll improve yer ! I'll smash yer ! Bust my bones, if I don't swing for yer, my beauty !" He took up the empty bottle that had held the gin, and with his powerful arm raised it aloft ; then, in mere gleeful boisterous drunken recklessness, he dashed it down with all his force upon the woman's head. Sal put up her arm hastily to avert it. The bottle broke into a hundred fragments, and the blood spurted out in one hideous splash from a dozen separate horrid gashes on the wretched woman's bloated face and neck and shoulders. At the sight, Lizbeth gave a loud scream of horror and alarm, and rushed over with outstretched arms to screen and protect the unfortunate creature as far as her thin little body would allow her. But Bill had finished his work now, and attempted no further act of violence. His brutality was not sullen or vindictive ; it belonged rather to the easy-going, rollicking order of lawlessness. He merely stood with his hands in his pockets, singing low to himself in a mocking voice his usual street cry of "Penny-wink, penny-wink, oh !" and smiling benignly at the awful picture of blood and misery wrought by his action among the rags in the corner.

As a rule, screams, however loud or frequent, attracted but little attention in that vile lodging-house. But Lizbeth's one wild scream of terror was a scream of a totally different category—the sort of scream which the inhabitants of the tenement immediately recognized by native instinct as calling for the necessity of police intervention. In another minute the miserable attic was thronged full of inquiring men and women, half-clad or wrapped in dirty shawls, some of whom held up Sal in bed and endeavoured feebly to staunch her bleeding ; while others eagerly interrogated the immovable Bill or poor cowering and almost speechless Lizbeth. Bill, however, firm upon the constitutional right of every Englishman to answer no incriminating question, contented himself, unmoved and unconcerned, with still humming "Penny-wink ; penny-wink, oh !" and politely requesting his attentive fellow-lodgers to "fetch the police for that there intoxicated female over yonder."

Before long, the police indeed arrived, three constables strong, and immediately cleared the decks for action. The crowd of ragged men and women all hurried forward with anxious faces, every one talking at once in a Babel of voices, and eager each to give their own version of the strange affair of which, of course, they knew, and could know absolutely nothing. The policemen waved them quietly aside, and

with professional instinct proceeded in a sober business-like way to collar the unresisting Bill, who stood there still with his hands in his pockets, inanely smiling at the havoc he had wrought, and apparently even more jolly than ever. Two of them went out and fetched a stretcher. "Take the woman to the Middlesex Hospital," the leader said, in his official way. One constable and two or three of the lodgers took up the stretcher. The woman opened her eyes as they lifted her up. "Bill," she cried hoarsely through her set teeth, with a savage oath unfit to be recorded, "you shall swing for this! You shall! You shall swing for it, you beggar!"

"Shouldn't be surprised if I did," the man muttered, gazing back in her face with imperturbable brutal carelessness. "That'd be just like the law of England now! 'Ang me for smashing a woman to-night as 'ud 'ave to 'ave died anyhow to-morrer. That's wot the beaks calls administration of justice! Justice, indeed! I'd justice 'em, wigs an' all, the 'ole blooming addle-headed lot of 'em!" And he laughed a loud half-tipsy laugh, while he submitted to be led away quietly and unresistingly between the two stout and resolute-looking policemen.

As for Lizbeth, she rose from beside the bed of rags when they took her mother, and followed the stretcher close like a dog, till she reached the steps of the Middlesex Hospital.

CHAPTER X.

THAT evening, in Harry Chichele's comfortable room at the Middlesex Hospital, Harry and Mohammad Ali sat late by the fireside discussing the very remarkable results that Harry had deduced, by the aid of the microscope, from his study of the germs in the polluted water from Santander, washed ashore in the cask from the wreck of the *Seamew*.

"Yes, the rabbits, every one of them, died within twenty-four hours," Harry Chichele remarked with much animation. "I'm cultivating their germs now in a new medium, after Pasteur's method, and after my own. My own, as I suspected, is infinitely superior—infinitely superior. It modifies the virus far more perfectly."

It was a curious place, that neat private sitting-room of Harry Chichele's. The Begum, whom he had brought back, after all, in her box from Cornwall, despite the protestations of the Great Western Railway Company and its accredited agents, could have had no reasonable cause to complain of the want of that congenial poisonous atmosphere which Mohammad Ali had so confidently promised her. The whole place fairly reeked of infusion, germs, viruses, and poisons. It was, in fact, the private laboratory of an able and enthusiastic scientific poison fancier.

Mohammad Ali had just returned to town, six weeks later than

Harry Chichele, after a round of visits to country houses, among old friends and college acquaintances. He had been to stop with Ivan Royle, among others, at a place in Warwickshire, where he had made the acquaintance of Seeta Mayne, the well-known novelist, sister of the ill-fated owner of the *Seamew*. Ali had taken rather a dislike at first sight to Seeta Mayne, he knew not why. She was one of those terrible women, he said to Harry, who oppress you at once with a burdensome sense of their cleverness and their greatness. A woman to admire, indeed, from a safe distance; better known in her books than her proper person. "So different from Miss Tregellas," Ali added with a sigh, looking hard at Harry, and ruminating inwardly.

"I should like to meet her, all the same," Harry answered off hand, rising from his velvet-covered easy-chair, and opening the window half an inch, as he candidly remarked, to let in a little of the brown fog, and let out the fumes of that nasty Calabar bean he had been experimenting upon. "I can't tell you how much I admire her books. She's a wonderful delineator of human nature."

A decanter of pale wine stood upon the table, with a paper slip pasted as label across the outside. Mohammad Ali took it up carelessly in his hand. "I don't mind taking a glass of your sherry," he said, pouring it out, "the Koran to the contrary, notwithstanding. Of all the Prophet's laws, I've always found that the easiest broken." And he poured himself out a glassful with casual ease, into a wine-glass that stood beside it on the table.

"Sherry!" Harry Chichele cried, in a tone of alarm, rushing forward just in time to prevent his friend from raising it to his lips. "Goodness gracious, Ali, what in the name of heaven are you doing or thinking of! Never, for your life, eat or drink anything, however seemingly harmless, that you find lying about loose in this laboratory of mine. The very cups and saucers are poisonous. That's suspected sherry, sent in last night for my critical opinion by the Government analyst. A barrister fellow over at Reigate popped off suddenly day before yesterday—you must have seen the case in the *Times*. His wife and he weren't on the best of terms, it seems. Question of an actress—the usual story. He went to bed at night happy and jolly, and woke up early next morning to find himself dead for the last three hours. If you'd drunk that glassful off, I dare say, Ali, you'd have been as dead by this time as the dog and the barrister."

"Very likely," Mohammad Ali answered, with his usual Eastern calmness of demeanour, as his friend touched the electric bell at his side for a glass of sherry that was not suspected. "That shows that the Prophet was right, after all. Avoid all appearance of evil. You've got some new things here, Harry, since I went away, I see by the labels."

"Oh, pretty well," Harry Chichele answered in the half-affected depreciatory voice of the connoisseur who exhibits his treasures to an intelligent spectator.

Mohammad Ali paced up and down the room with a critical air before the mysterious jars and cupboards. "Canadian poison ivy," he mur-

mured softly, reading the labels; "that's new now, isn't it? Ah, yes, I thought so; those sumach extracts are so extremely interesting. Thorn-apple again—four fresh varieties. I saw your paper about those in *Nature*. Yield an insipid narcotic alkaloid allied to atropine. Beautiful, beautiful! Your experiments and results were exceedingly pretty. Have you ever noticed, by the way, that deadly nightshade grows nowhere in England except about the ruins of your old monasteries? Speaks badly for the morality of the mediæval fathers that, doesn't it? Unless, indeed, they only used it for the painless removal of Jews, Turks, heretics, and infidels."

"Of whom you would have been one," Harry Chichele interposed, smiling.

"Of whom I should have been one, no doubt," the Mohammedan went on with grave composure. "The monks would have converted me with great pleasure, from the error of my ways, at least into a corpse, if not into a Christian. What's this here? American hemlock—paralyzes the muscles of respiration, I fancy. Manchmeal, Indian hemp, Madagascar Ordeal Poison. What's the antidote? They must have something the medicine men give them to counteract the evil effects of that whenever necessary, or it couldn't possibly be used for an ordeal. All ordeals admit of dodging, that's what they're for; the medicine men always work the oracle."

"Of course," Harry Chichele answered, pouring out the unsuspecting sherry.

"Upas tree," Ali went on, running them over. "That's new, again. I've seen that in India. Affects the spinal cord instantaneously, and causes death by universal tetanus. And here's aconitine, the same as in the sherry there. Whatever did your barrister go and use such stuff as that for, I wonder?"

"I can't imagine," Harry answered lightly. "The more fool he. A man must be a fool in the nineteenth century if he has reasons for wishing to get rid of anybody, to go and do anything so clumsy as poison him. Poison can be always detected nowadays. And especially when there are so many other better ways now possible that absolutely and utterly defy detection."

"What ways?" Mohammad Ali asked glancing up hastily, with some curiosity.

"Oh, physiological and pathological ways, I mean, of course. Why, if you or I, who are practised medical hands, had any good grounds for wishing to disembarass our career of any obnoxious person or persons, do you mean to say we couldn't find a thousand ways ready to hand for dexterously removing them without arousing undue suspicion? Of course we could, my dear fellow, put them out of the way as soon as look at them.

"I couldn't, thank heaven," Ali, answered, drawing a long breath. "And what's more, I shouldn't like to be able, either. Knowledge of the means of crime is a dangerous thing—even for a Moslem."

"But not for the emancipated," Harry Chichele interposed airily.

"The masses, of course, might misuse their information—they're not

to be trusted with knowledge like that ; but the emancipated would never dream of employing it except in the interests of humanity and of science. Well, now, I'll tell you about these lovely germ researches of mine, Ali. I've arrived at really wonderful results. I'm just on the very verge, do you know, of establishing a totally new conception of the entire question."

Mohammad Ali seated himself, all ears, beside the table, while Harry Chichele pulled forward his microscope, and drew from his drawers a number of slides and several sheets of pencil diagrams. In two minutes, the pair of enthusiasts were deep in a profound professional discussion, Harry Chichele demonstrating with immense ardour, while Mohammad Ali, attentive and eager, listened and criticized with obvious admiration.

At last the Indian leaned back in his chair with an air of complete though half-unwilling conviction. "You've proved your point, Harry," he cried ; "not a doubt about it ; you've fairly proved it. There's only one thing you want now, and that's a patient who dies in the final collapsing stage of lodging-house fever. If the germs there—microbes or bacteria, or whatever else you choose to call them—do really exhibit this jointed condition which you suspect, then your theory of their origin from fungoid sporules will be simply and solely a mathematical demonstration. It's a great discovery—a splendid discovery. You're lucky to have made it. Your series of slides is just magnificent—especially the germs from the cholera-water and the rinderpest in cattle."

"Yes," Harry Chichele answered in a voice of modest self-congratulation. "I flatter myself it's a neat demonstration. I'm only waiting for that final test—a case of which is sure to drop in before long—and then I shall read a paper on the subject before the Royal Society. I'm anxious about this paper, and about the result of the investigation, because, to tell you the truth, I think, Ali, it'll make my fortune. And, as you know, I have certain special and exceptional reasons for wishing just now to get my fortune made."

The Indian smiled a grave smile of uneasy acquiescence, and glanced at the pretty cabinet photograph of Olwen Tregellas, framed in a dark blue velvet mount, which hung above the centre of Harry Chichele's mantelpiece.

Harry followed him closely with his eyes. "Of course," he went on, perceiving the drift of Mohammad Ali's thoughts, "I could marry even now, if I chose, on my own little means—my grandmother's money—which would be enough to support us in 'genteel economy,' as the porter calls it ; but I don't want to do that. I don't want to impose upon my wife a 'genteel economy.' I want to make myself a place in the world first, and make it a place fit for Olwen herself to occupy." He called her "Olwen," quite unconcernedly now, and it grated on Mohammad Ali's ear to hear him. "Now, if I can succeed in proving the truth of my theory, I shall have put myself at once in the very first ranks of the profession, shan't I ? Since Jenner discovered vaccination, in fact, no bigger thing's been done in medicine than this new

hypothesis. And for Olwen's sake, I should like to do it. I should like to think I had a chance of ending by becoming some day President of the Royal College of Physicians, and making my wife into Lady Chichele.

"I have no doubt at all you will," Mohammad Ali answered abstractedly. "You're cut out for it. It's your natural goal. You're by far the ablest man in the profession that I know of. Harry, did Miss Tregellas give you that portrait of herself that Royle did for her?"

"No," Harry replied, glancing once more with a depreciating look at the photograph on the mantelpiece, "or else it'd been standing where that wretched likeness does now; for I must say Royle caught her expression and her graceful figure quite admirably—a most life-like portrait. But Olwen didn't think she ought to let me have it—at present—she said. Royle seemed a little stand-offish about it, you remember: spoke rudely to me, not to say foolishly; and she felt as if she were in honour bound to keep it herself, as he gave it to her and refused it to me, until—well, until, in short, it naturally comes into my possession, with everything else that belongs to Olwen. She was quite right, and I perfectly agreed with her; but I must say I should have liked all the same to have had that picture."

Mohammad Ali drummed upon the table. "Your grandmother's money," he said, reverting. "You get your income from her, do you? She was a Peyton, if I recollect aright—a Yorkshire Peyton. Harry, do you happen to know anything about your grandmother's family?"

"Well, not very much, if you ask me that. I'm anything but curious in these matters. Genealogies have precious little interest for me. I am what I am. I care very little about who went before me. Science disregards families and pedigrees."

"You are what you are! No, no, Harry," the Mussulman cried, with a sudden gesture of disapprobation. "You speak neither like a Moslem nor a scientific man. Has not the whole burden of our own age been simply that—hereditary genius, hereditary insanity, hereditary morals, hereditary crime? You fancy you stand alone in the world; that you can break with the past and create the future. You think you can make yourself what you choose yourself. My dear fellow, you're grievously mistaken. We're each of us but a new incarnation of our fathers and mothers—a fresh creator, as our Hindoos would call it, of the ancestral spirit. It behoves us all to know somewhat of our progenitors; we are bone of their bone, blood of their blood, and their sins shall be visited on us—aye, and repeated by us, too, in our own persons—unto the third and fourth generation."

At that very moment, as Harry opened his lips to reply, a gentle tap sounded upon the door, and a nurse, in her white cap and regulation apron, putting in her head, said briefly, "Doctor, you're wanted, if you please, in the fever ward. A complicated case. Fever and accident."

The two men, disturbed at the news, ran upstairs hastily, and arrived at once in the crowded fever ward. On a cot at the far end, a ghastly sight met their eyes—a woman with a bloated pulpy-looking face, all

hacked and cut about the cheeks and forehead, with open wounds, still raw and red and bleeding faintly. The surgeon in attendance stood at the head of the bed. "Good evening, Chichele," he said, as they entered. "Good evening, Ali. Why, I'm glad to see you back again in England. I've sent for you, Chichele, to look at this woman—new case—just admitted. Sarah Wilcox, they give her name, from a low lodging den in the slums of Marylebone. It's a police case, you see, of the ordinary character; but it's very complicated—very complicated. Man's assaulted his wife with an empty gin bottle, and cut her all over the head and shoulders with the broken pieces. At the same time the woman's dying already—in the last stage of lodging-house fever. It's a neat forensic question, as you perceive; and I shall want you to help me in watching the thing through carefully, for, if the patient dies of the wounds, of course, or of gangrene or blood-poisoning arising from them, why, then, as you know, it'll be wilful murder, or, at least, manslaughter. But if she only dies of the fever itself, without death having been in any way accelerated by the row, why, then, it's merely the common case of aggravated assault. We shall have to be very accurate in observing it, for the question's almost sure to be raised sooner or later before a jury."

Harry Chichele looked down on the woman with unfeigned and unconcealed delight. "I'll take every care of her," he said, "every possible care of her, you may be sure, Macpherson. The case, as it happens, is just one I was anxious to observe in connection with these new germ researches of mine. Ali, this is really a wonderful bit of luck—some people would call it distinctly providential. The very thing we wanted to see. A case of collapse in lodging-house fever."

They went to work speedily with the usual precautions, and soon had settled the unconscious patient fairly in her bed. She was, indeed, a loathsome object now to look upon—her livid face all scarred with wounds and covered with bandages, her swollen eyelids white and puffy, her thick lips almost black with congestion, and her breath coming and going from her heaving chest with stertorous distinctness. It needed all a doctor's resolution and experience to make any man handle gently such a hideous caricature of feminine humanity.

"She's the very case I wanted," Harry Chichele murmured to Ali again, as they finished their task and paused for a moment. "As soon as she's dead, she'll give me the exact opportunity needed to complete the outline of my new theory."

"But suppose she doesn't die, though?" Mohammad Ali put in with malicious dryness.

Harry Chichele looked up at him sharply. "But she *will* die," he answered, in a short, quick, decisive tone. "There's no 'suppose' at all about the matter. When a patient reaches such a stage as this, the thing's as good as settled already. Miracles are out of date nowadays. The only question is, which cause will she die of—accident or the fever. I shall hold the post-mortem myself at ten to-morrow. Nurse, whatever hour of day or night this case goes off, send down at once, please, and have me knocked up to certify cause of death immediately."

CHAPTER XI.

It was long past twelve when Harry Chichele lounged down to the big front door of the Middlesex Hospital to see Mohammad Ali safely off the premises.

On the stone steps, an altercation was in full progress, in loud tones, between the stout porter and a bundle of rags that lay in a huddled heap beside the portico pillars.

"Git up, will you, and go off 'ome," the porter exclaimed in his angriest voice. "You ain't no call to go sleepin' 'ere. If you don't git, out, I'll whistle for the police for you."

The bundle of rags moaned piteously. "I ain't got no 'ome to go to now," it replied in childish misery. "Father, he's run in, and took off to the lock-up for murderin' mother; an' mother she's inside 'ere where they've took 'er, a-dying in the 'ospital."

"That ain't no business of mine, I tell you," the stout porter rejoined, with official dignity. "If you ain't got no 'ome to go to, why, then apply to the parochial authorities for relief—git took into the union, you know—but don't go incommodin' the committee an' the public by sleepin' out on the steps of the 'ospital."

Harry Chichele ran down bareheaded to inspect the poor little terrified morsel of humanity. He raised up the bundle of rags in his hands with gentle forbearance and an entire absence of that involuntary appearance of disgust which most of us display, almost by instinct, towards very dirty and tattered children. Old experience in a London hospital had taught him long since to accept dirt in a philosophical spirit as a natural concomitant of the residuum of our species. He clasped the poor thin little hand good-naturedly in his own, and asked the small outcast in a quiet soothing voice where she lived and what she wanted.

"I don't live nowheres," the child answered, "and I want mother."

Harry Chichele looked more closely at the girl's head. "Why, goodness gracious," he said in a shocked tone, "what's this? You've got a bad wound on it, little woman—a wound that ought to be dressed at once. The idea of your exposing yourself on a night like this to the open air with such a wound as that upon you! Why, it's enough to kill you outright. Come in at once, there's a good girl, and let's see what we can do for you."

Surprised at the unexpected kindness of his manner, Lizbeth followed him, nothing loth, up the big steps, and through the lighted corridor, into Harry Chichele's own cosy and comfortable sitting-room.

"Are you hungry, little one!" Harry asked going straight to the point with the first great need of starving humanity.

The child nodded an eager assent. He had hit the bull's-eye. She

was far too frightened by the light and glare to open her lips, but she understood at once that a rare prospect of food loomed visibly in the middle distance.

"Sit down, my child," Harry said, pushing her a chair beside the centre table, with a kindly gesture. The girl seated herself with silent awe upon the extreme edge. Harry went over to the cheffonier in the corner, and brought out, one after another, a cold tongue, a box of biscuits, a cut sponge cake, and some apricot jam. Lizbeth's eyes glittered strangely. Harry had seen the same sort of glitter before. He knew where. In the eyes of the greater carnivores at the Zoo, when their daily dole of meat is being served out to them.

He cut her a slice or two of the tongue, laid it on a plate, and gave it to the child with a knife and fork. She took them up so awkwardly, and with such evident doubt, that Harry saw at once she had never handled those dangerous implements of advanced civilization in her life before. "I've no bread in the house," he said apologetically, "so I must ask you kindly to put up with biscuits," and as he spoke he handed her a couple. The child stuffed one into her mouth whole, with a huge piece of tongue to keep it company, and appeared for the moment absolutely lost in supreme and unutterable ecstasies of happiness.

She ate a supper that fully satisfied Harry Chichele's benevolent intentions, from tongue and biscuits to sponge cake and apricot jam; and when she had quite finished, he sat her in a chair beside the blazing hearth, and examined the wound on her head with closer attention. After a short examination, he rang the bell. "Send a nurse here," he said to the servant.

The nurse came with the promptitude of a big organization. "Nurse," Harry Chichele began, "I want you to take this poor little thing away and cut her hair off. Cut it all off quite close to the head, and give her a bath, and then—well, then, what can we do for her? We can't put her back into her rags again, can we?"

"Is she a patient, doctor?" the nurse inquired.

"No," Harry Chichele answered promptly. "She's here as my friend. I want to see to the wound on her head privately. Could you get anything in the way of clothes to rig her up in?"

"I've no doubt we could borrow some," the nurse replied with official coolness. "Come along with me, child. We'll do our best for her."

Lizbeth loitered as if loth to go. "Where's mother?" she asked at last, beginning to sob again with the fresh strength the unwanted food and drink had given her. "I want to go and see mother."

"Is your mother's name Sarah Wilcox?" Harry asked, sympathetically.

"Yes," the child answered, beginning to cry. "Leastways, it's Sal, an' Mrs. Wilcox."

"Well, your mother's upstairs, then," Harry replied with soothing calmness. "She's under my care, and I'm the doctor of this hospital. She's been put to bed in a nice warm cot, and her wounds have been

dressed, and she's had everything she could possibly want, and now she's sleeping. Go along with nurse, and do as she tells you ; and you shall see mother the very first thing to-morrow morning."

"Thank you," the child said simply. So much kindness fairly took her breath away. She had never met anything like it in her life before.

She went with the nurse very reluctantly, and followed her into the matron's room.

"Who's this?" the matron asked, looking up in surprise.

The nurse tossed her head superciliously. "Oh, only a gutter-child," she answered with a coarse laugh. "Another of Dr. Chichele's philanthropic ideas. He's always full of his fads and his fancies."

In half an hour Lizbeth returned again, an odd little figure indeed, washed, and cropped, and queerly rigged out in various collected articles of clothing, all of them more or less too large for her, borrowed here and there among the different nurses. Harry Chichele smiling at her metamorphosis, dressed her wound with great care, and made it beautifully cool and comfortable.

"She must sleep here somewhere," he said, in an undertone to the nurse, when he had finished. "We must make her up a rough bed somehow on the sofa."

They made it up, and laid her down there, wrapped round in a rug, and in her new clothes just as she stood, and in ten minutes more the poor gutter-child, wearied out with pain and with the day's events, and filled with unwonted meat and drink, was lying sound asleep on her improvised couch in the deep unbroken sleep of childhood.

She never opened her eyes again till next morning, when the servant came in to lay the table for Harry Chichele's breakfast. Such a breakfast! Rich beyond all the dreams of esturian avarice! Big brown sausages, and honey in the comb, and hot rolls, and steaming coffee of delicious aroma! Lizbeth's eyes revelled in the spectacle, her nostrils sniffed up the fragrance of the coffee. And when the kind gentleman himself came in, and sent her off with the nurse to be washed, and then set her down at the table by his own side, and helped her to all the good things in turn, as if she was the Queen of England in person, Lizbeth's delight, and joy, and admiration were positively unbounded.

After breakfast, however, she began to ask once more with painful persistence to see her mother. Harry temporized. He pacified her with promises for the moment ; he would go upstairs himself first, and see how mother was getting on, he told her.

In the small bed at the far end of the fever ward the new case, Sarah Wilcox, lay breathing heavily, but with her eyes open. Harry glanced at her, and then looked up at the nurse in surprise. "Why, how's this?" he asked, in a voice by no means over-pleased. "The woman's alive! Alive and vigorous! And what's more, she's a trifle better, too! Nurse, nurse, what have you been doing to her?"

"Nothing but what you have ordered, doctor," the nurse answered, a little surprised. "We've changed the poultices every two hours. She rallied in the night. She's taken beef-tea and jelly frequently."

"Confound her," Harry murmured to himself, turning away disappointed. "Just like the disgusting perversity of things. If we'd wanted to cure the wretched creature, she'd have gone and died, of course, to spite her relations. But just because she's an interesting case to investigate, she must go and rally, to spite scientific medicine. A wretched, animated gin-bottle like that! What possible good can she be to the world, I wonder, except, indeed, to experiment upon? Talk about the *corpus vile*, forsooth! What *corpus vilis* could you get than her miserable carcass?" And he went downstairs muttering to himself in righteous indignation against the unhappy being, because she wouldn't die fast enough at the right moment, to oblige science.

"Your mother's better," he said to Lizbeth, with a pleasant smile, as he reached his own room. "A nurse will take you up presently to see her. How's the poor head this morning? Ah, that's well! Filming over nicely. Wonderful recuperative power in the family, evidently. How did you get it? Father again? Was he practising gymnastics on you, too, my friend, with his empty gin-bottle?"

The child hesitated. "N—no," she said. "It wasn't him; it was mother as done it. She took the ink-bottle and throwed it at my'ead. But it wasn't no fault of her'n, poor dear. She was angry with me, acoz I didn't git her the gin quick enough when she wanted it."

Harry set his lips firm. "The old fiend!" he muttered shortly to himself. "She looks as if she was every inch capable of it. A creature like that to block the way of science! It's too absurd! The world would be more than well rid of her! And yet, a ridiculous Puritanical law ——" He paused significantly. "Well, well Lizbeth," he went on, after a minute's reflection, "you can ring the bell now, if you like, for nurse to take you up to see to mother."

It was ten minutes to ten by the hospital clock when Mohammad Ali knocked at the door, and entered the room, smiling and business-like.

"Why, Ali, you're early," her friend cried, surprised at his appearance.

"Oh yes, I'm early," Ali answered unabashed, with a quiet smile. "The pursuit of science has roused me betimes from my virtuous couch at the hotel round the corner. I've come round early to see the theory justified. You mentioned ten sharp, I think, for the post-mortem."

Chichele's face fell abruptly. He was in no humour just then for professional chaff. The incredible perversity of Sarah Wilcox in persisting to live against all medical advice and prevision, had somewhat ruffled his usual repose. "I did," he replied, with sardonic irony; "but an unexpected hitch has meanwhile arisen. The subject obstinately declines to put herself in a proper position for the furtherance of scientific investigation. I regret to say she's positively and absurdly better this morning."

"I thought as much," Mohammad Ali answered, with that annoying smile of his—a most unsympathetic man at times, Mohammad Ali. "She looked a particular tough subject, I fancied. It takes a great

deal to kill these tough subjects of the lowest social strata. The germs and they have a hard tussle over it. So she's better, is she? Well, well, that's well. The first business of medical science is to prolong life."

"Ali, if you fling your miserable little moral platitudes of the profession at my head this morning, I will arise and slay you with my hands, as King Arthur observed on a critical occasion to the bold Sir Bedivere. But why prolong a life of abject misery? Why prolong a life that's of no sort of use, or good, or advantage, to itself or anybody else that comes across it? For my own part, I don't mind candidly confessing to you that I don't want this tough subject to go on living any longer. A miserable, bloated, drunken creature, who stupefies herself with gin, and mauls her husband, and makes her abject little child's life utterly unhappy by her gross cruelty. Why, it was she who scalped the poor girl's temple. You should just see the wound—a raw place as big as the palm of my hand—grazed with the sharp edge of an earthen ink-bottle. Pah! it's just sickening to think of it! The squalid abomination, cutting open her own child's head with a savage blow like that. It makes me angry even to realize that such things can be in this nineteenth century England of ours."

Mohammad Ali bowed his head. "England is perhaps not absolutely perfect," he admitted candidly.

"And then to think," Harry Chichele continued, bridling up with genuine enthusiasm, "of all the good that would result to the world from the establishment of my theory! The valuable lives that would be saved for humanity! The wrenches that would be spared to parents and children? The hold we should gain over epidemic diseases! Why, our entire principles and practice of hygiene would be revolutionized offhand. Fever would be banished, cholera dispelled, diphtheria and scarlatina held at arm's length! Earth would become a really habitable planet, and the triumphant germ who now walks up and down this oblate spheroid of ours like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, would have his fangs drawn and his claws pared by the calm, cool, dispassionate prevision of prophylactic science! All these good things would come to mankind—and I should be able to marry Olwen Tregellas! But no! That bloated, pasty-faced drunken old reprobate, lying in bed in her sins upstairs there, stops the way for all future progress! Why, a woman with a conscience would die to order under such circumstances; but creatures like that have nine lives and no conscience. I hope to goodness she's arrived at the ninth and last of hers by this time!"

CHAPTER XII.

THAT long day through, the woman Wilcox dragged on dubiously, hanging by a slender thread the whole time between life and death, but never dying—as in reason she ought to have done. From time to time Harry Chichele ran upstairs and watched her, while Mohammad Ali hung about the hospital (where he was well known of old) “to see fair between science and the patient,” as he himself quaintly phrased it.

About three in the afternoon the house-surgeon asked them to step round with him to the neighbouring police-court, where he had to give evidence in the case of assault against the woman's husband. Harry dropped in and listened to the hearing, his little charge, in her quaint rig-out, being naturally one of the principal witnesses. As her acquaintance with the nature of an oath seemed evidently both profound and exhaustive, her testimony was, of course, received as indubitably valid. The man Wilcox—fish merchant, of Little Walpole Street, Marylebone, he called himself on the charge-sheet—was charged for the present with aggravated assault; but the police intimated, in their cautious way, that the case might turn out, “with eventualities,” to widen out into one of wilful murder. Such a picturesque collection of ragged and unwashed brutality as the lodging-house witnesses, Harry had never before beheld; nor did the personal appearance of the prisoner, William Wilcox himself, fish-merchant, of Little Walpole Street, prepossess him largely in favour of his doubtful patient at the Middlesex Hospital. The accused fish-merchant was most undeniably fishy. A more unmitigated ruffian of his own type it would have been hard to find outside Newgate, and Harry Chichele thought in his own soul that if the world could be well rid of the entire precious pair of them at once, the world, on the whole, might rather be congratulated than otherwise on the salutary process.

“What will become of the child?” the magistrate asked with some interest, after remanding the prisoner. “A bright girl, and gave her important evidence well and clearly.”

“For the present,” Harry said, laying his kindly hand upon the child's head, “I undertake to look after her. What we shall do with her in the end must depend, of course, upon the eventualities.”

The magistrate smiled. The court smiled. Bill himself smiled most prodigiously. Eventualities is such a very fine word to describe the chance of your getting hanged or not. Even though the odds were heavy on hanging, Bill would have his smile over it, with the rest of the world, like a courteous gentleman.

As the afternoon wore away, however, and the critical period of the disease seemed to be passing by, without the woman getting noticeably worse, or noticeably better for that matter, either, Harry Chichele

began to reason with himself on the chance of death quite seriously. What was this wretched woman's life worth, compared with the universal good and benefit of the whole world—with his own and Olwen Tregellas's happiness? How foolish to believe one might lawfully kill an open foe, but not get rid, when occasion demanded, of these morbid excrescences, these tumours and cancers, upon the very fabric and organism of society! No, no; the thing was as clear as day. It was expedient that this one sordid life should be offered up on the altar of society—and of the new germ theory.

For his own sake, Harry Chichele would not have entertained the notion, perhaps, nor even for society's. Society, no doubt, at the cost of some thousand valuable lives or so, could still wait a month or two longer; for society, you see, has waited so long, and is, after all, such a pure abstraction. But for Olwen's—for Olwen's! He stood trembling now on the very verge of a great, a glorious, and an epoch-making discovery. If he completed it at once, well and good. Olwen's future would be amply secured to her. But if he didn't, some obscure German or other, in some out-of-the-way university laboratory among the wilds of Saxony, might get wind of it and be beforehand with him, and prove his discovery a week earlier than he himself had succeeded in proving it. These obscure Germans are always anticipating our best ideas in their cold-blooded, grasping, Teutonic fashion. And then, there would be an end at once of his splendid dream of fame and competence. Olwen would never be Lady Chichele. Yes, yes, there was no denying it, the woman must go; humanity and science, and Olwen's future, all alike imperatively demanded it.

But how? That was the question. Pooh! as he himself had said last night in passing, to Mohammad Ali, if you really want to get rid of anybody, there are a thousand ways—physiological ways and pathological ways—in which a competent medical man can dexterously remove an obnoxious person without for one moment arousing undue suspicion.

What ways? Oh, easy enough! The first thing is to make up your mind. That done, the rest all comes as pat as the alphabet. The real question was now, did he or did he not mean to do it?

So Harry ruminated, sometimes stretched back in his easy-chair, sometimes pacing up and down his room now and again, and surprising little Lizbeth with his deep-drawn breaths, as she sat at the table, quiet as a mouse, looking over the big bundle of children's picture-books, that Harry had borrowed from one of the nurses for her amusement.

Up and down the room he paced, time after time, absorbed in thought, and paused at last with knitted brows before Olwen Tregellas's photograph. His stern set lips relaxed at once at the sight. It was a pretty photograph, but it didn't do that sweet face full justice. Nothing on earth could do dear Olwen justice, not even Ivan Royle's delicious half-length portrait. Yet what could be lovelier, after all, than the delicate half-unconscious smile upon those parted lips? so pure, so maidenly, so innocent, so charming! Harry's whole soul went out with a sigh to that treasured photograph. He loved her! He loved

her ! She *must* be his ! She *should* be his ! He would make her his own ! She should live yet to be Lady Chichele !

That object upstairs stand for one moment in his angel's way ! Heaven forbid ! Never ! never !—ten thousand times never ! If the creature had as many lives as the sands on the shore, there should never a life of them stand in the way for Olwen ! for Olwen !—for his own bright, beautiful, innocent Olwen !

When he turned away from that smiling photograph of the simple, pretty, tender-hearted Cornish girl, Sarah Wilcox's fate was sealed irrevocably—as irrevocably as if sentence of death had been pronounced against her in due form by the highest tribunal in this realm of England.

"Ring the bell, little woman, will you ?" he said with his winning voice softly to Lizbeth. "I want to ask nurse something about your mother."

A servant answered the bell immediately. "Will you kindly ask the nurse in the fever ward," Harry Chichele said in his politest manner, "when Sarah Wilcox's poultices will next be changed ?"

The man came back again in two minutes. "At half-past six, sir," he said briefly. Harry Chichele nodded a satisfied nod. "Good," he answered ; "that will do perfectly. Please get me a basket from the porter, Thomas."

When the basket arrived, Harry looked across with a pleasant smile to Lizbeth. "My child," he said kindly, "I'm going out now on an errand for five minutes. I have to get something from the chemist for your mother. You can amuse yourself while I'm away, I suppose, with all these toys and picture-books and things ?"

Lizbeth looked up at him with a puzzled smile. "I never was so 'appy in all my born days afore," she said simply. "I think you're the kindest gentleman as ever lived. I'd like to stop 'ere for ever and ever."

Harry nodded his genuine pleasure at her words, and left the room abruptly. He walked along the street with his even pace to the nearest chemist's, where he bought a couple of waterproof India-rubber bags, such as are commonly used for putting sponges in ; one of the very largest size, the other about half an inch smaller. Then he strolled quietly on to the fishmonger's and bought a couple of pounds of ice, which he put inside the larger bag, and carried home to his own rooms in the basket.

They had always plenty of ice and to spare at the hospital, but Harry didn't care to ask for any just then. In these little matters, it is best, as far as possible, to avoid exciting attention or arousing suspicion. What can a man want with ice in his own rooms on a chilly, damp November evening ? He quoted to himself the "Bab Ballads :—" "The novelty would striking be, and must excite remark." To excite remark was just what he wished to avoid ; he must manage this little affair for himself in the strictest secrecy.

When he got home again, he carried the basket into his own bedroom, and proceeded noiselessly to crush the ice small with a pestle and

mortar. As soon as he had crushed it to the proper size, he put it into the larger India-rubber bag, and laid the smaller one loose within it. Then he sewed them both together at the top, so that the whole arrangement made a dry double waterproof ice bag (with the ice inside), into which a man could thrust his hand and keep as stone-cold as long as he wanted, without its getting wet or otherwise attracting attention. That done, he rolled the entire apparatus up in the blanket on his own bed, and went out once more into the warm sitting-room. Lizbeth noticed, when he came back, that he had changed his coat. He was now wearing his loose brown velveteen jacket, with very wide and capacious side pockets.

In the sitting-room he sat down to his Davenport at once, and, finding he had still ten minutes to spare, filled up the time by continuing his half-written letter to Olwen, which he had interrupted when he first began to think over this little scheme for—well, for aiding and abetting Nature in getting rid of that miserable, bloated, drunken object.

"And then, my own heart's darling," he was writing hastily, "I shall be able at last, more truly than ever, to call you in very truth my own. Of course you are my own, my very own, already, I know; my own in heart and thought and feeling; my own in every inmost thrill of your nature; but I want you to be still more intimately mine; to live with you and watch you all day long; to do my best to make you happy; to let your life ennoble mine, to let my life strengthen and enrich yours; as every true and perfect union—man's and woman's—ought mutually to do. Oh, Olwen, my darling, my own dearest one, I wish I could tell you how every hour of the day —"

At that exact moment the muffled hospital clock struck slowly the single note of half-past six. That dull sound recalled Harry to himself with a start. He replaced the letter instantly in the desk, locked the lid down, and hurried off at once into his own bedroom. When he emerged, his right hand was plunged deep in his coat pocket, and a resolute smile played ominously about the firm-set corners of his thin pale lips.

In the fever ward above, Mohammad Ali, the nurse, and the house-surgeon were all waiting for him by the patient's bedside. Sarah Wilcox lay half insensible on her narrow cot with rolling eyes, that showed the whites and part of the iris; and her breathing was still loud and stertorous. "We must be very careful," the house-surgeon said as Harry approached. "Life and death hang upon it, you see, both for the woman herself and for her husband too. The slightest chill would instantly kill her, I think. What do you say, eh, Chichele?"

"Wants great care," Harry answered, in a slow deliberate tone, inspecting her closely. "Come round here, Ali. You stand over at the side and help me. I'll support her back while nurse gets ready the flannel bandage. Now, nurse, quick! Have the things handy. Don't lose a minute! A chill may be fatal!"

"Are your hands warm?" Mohammad Ali asked suspiciously, with his oriental quickness. Harry held out his left with the utmost frankness for his friend to feel. Ali clasped it in his, and nodded satisfied.

It was warm as a toast. The right hand lay still in the right-hand pocket—buried deep in the stone-cold ice-bag. Mohammad Ali, with all his sharpness, didn't think or ask to feel that one.

"Take off the poultice!" Harry said shortly.

The nurse removed it. Harry withdrew his right hand at once from the bag, and supported the woman with his broad palm on the small of her back. A cold shudder seemed to run like lightning through the wretched creature's spine. She opened her eyes and gasped for breath. For a second some mumbling word appeared to tremble inaudibly on her bloated lips. It was a hideous oath—an oath of the foulest and vulgarest profanity. She couldn't utter it—her strength was too low—but the house-surgeon, eyeing her sternly, on her quivering mouth saw her frame it visibly with a final effort, and shuddered his unaffected disgust. "She's a bad lot," he muttered, relaxing his hold. "Even at this last moment, Chichele, she's flinging horrible filthy oaths and names at us."

Harry Chichele smiled contented. That vile end justified to himself his own action. Who could care to save such a woman as that? Surely the world would be well rid of her.

They bound up the bandage and laid her down with care on the bed once more. The cold tremors still coursed convulsively down the creature's back. Harry regarded her awhile with close attention. "She won't pull through," he said. "She's too far gone. There's no chance now of her living till morning."

Mohammad Ali shook his head. "I can't understand it at all," he answered moodily. "Half an hour ago she seemed as if she were really rallying. Now she's going off with startling rapidity."

Harry smiled again, a calm wise smile, and went downstairs to his own room. It was more seemly so. Indecent anxiety would too readily betray itself. He would wait below for final news to be brought from the fever ward. In one more day the theory would be vindicated.

He didn't feel like a would-be murderer. He didn't consider himself in that light at all. People were always dying in the hospital; sometimes unavoidably, sometimes from the result of operations or from the carelessness or stupidity of nurses. One more death among so many mattered but little. It merely went in with the general average.

Half an hour passed slowly by upstairs, and the house-surgeon still watched with patient eyes the last struggles of the dying woman. Mohammad Ali stood by his side. "It's very odd," he whispered. "I can see what's happened, but I can't in the least account for it. We were careful to the last degree, yet some sudden chill must have congested the kidneys."

As he spoke the woman lifted her hand uneasily from the bed. She was groping about now as if feeling for something. Her fingers fumbled with the folds of the bedclothes. Presently, she raised her head a little. "Gin!" she cried in an audible voice, opening her eyes in one last flickering rally. "Gim'me some gin, gim'me some gin, you beggar!" And then, with a sudden ghastly collapse, she fell back speechless on the hospital pillow.

The nurse looked hard at her and nodded to the surgeon. The surgeon answered in his stereotyped voice, "Go down and tell Dr. Chichele." They were all so accustomed to strange deaths in that house of mercy that even this horrible one did not greatly affect them.

Harry Chichele was seated comfortably by his own table, giving Lizbeth a first lesson in the mysteries of backgammon, when Mohammad Ali and the nurse entered. "Sixes," he cried gaily, as the child threw. "You take those four times, you see, because it's a doublet. That's a good throw, Lizbeth; a capital throw. I couldn't have done it better myself. I believe you'll beat me after all, little woman. You're getting on famously. You'll make a first-rate backgammon player."

"Doctor," the nurse said, opening the door, without one word of preface or warning, "Sarah Wilcox is just dead. You said you wished to be told of it the moment it happened."

Harry Chichele's hand was upon Lizbeth's backgammon men, showing her how to take her doublets to the best advantage; and he would have gone on to make the four moves for her, in spite of the nurse's startling intelligence (as Mohammad Ali noticed from behind his keen quick eye) had he not been interrupted even as she spoke by a terrible, heartrending outburst of grief from poor, orphaned, and lonely little Lizbeth. She cried once, and then was silent. It was, indeed, a piercing and agonized cry—the short sharp wail of a broken heart that has lost its all at a single venture. Next moment the child threw back her head and stiffened her limbs. Her whole body grew stark and rigid. Her upturned eyes gleamed dull and deathlike. For a second she seemed almost as if really dead, so cold and stiff and motionless she lay, with her neck flung back, and her breath held long in deep unconsciousness.

Harry Chichele seized her tenderly in his arms, as a man might seize his own daughter. "Brandy!" he whispered quietly to Mohammad Ali. "Fan her, nurse! Fresh air! Fresh air! Fresh air! Don't crowd about her! Give her room to breathe! Poor little thing! poor little thing! What a soft little soul she must have, after all! Who would ever have thought she'd take it to heart like that? A miserable wretch of a woman such as her mother! Not fit to be mother to any living human creature!"

The child opened her eyes vaguely. "She was all the mother I 'ad," she muttered to herself in a slow deep voice, and then relapsed once more into perfect rigidity.

CHAPTER XIII.

MOHAMMAD ALI was right when he declared that Harry Chichele was by no means cruel or unfeeling in the grain. As the keen-eyed Moslem watched the Englishman assiduously nursing that poor motherless helpless little waif the evening through, with unceasing tenderness, he could not but think more than once to himself, "After all, my suspicions must have been ill-founded, and Harry's really a thorough good fellow in spite of everything." Could he still continue to believe him stern and hard-hearted? Could he hesitate to entrust even Olwen's happiness to a man who could lavish such gentle and patient excess of care upon a mere ragged small London outcast? Surely, surely, he must have been mistaken in his first estimate of the man's character.

For Harry undressed the child and laid her to rest with gentle arms in his own bed. The sofa would do well enough for himself to-night, he said. He sat beside her and held her thin small hand softly in his own; he put eau-de-Cologne upon her poor hot forehead; he fed her himself from a spoon with beef-tea, and milk-food, and essence, and jelly, as he had fed Ivan Royle, a couple of months before, away down at Polperran. He was all kindness and goodness and professional gentleness—the very embodiment of the ideal doctor.

Could Harry have done all this if he had really and truly—as Ali somehow vaguely suspected—in some way or other shortened the life of Lizbeth's miserable drunken mother.

Ali was inclined at first sight to answer, No. The paradox seemed almost incredible. No man could so completely possess two natures. And yet, was it really two natures after all? What more conceivable than that a person should be tender, sympathetic, lovable, gentle, should loathe cruelty or unnecessary pain, and yet should be absolutely devoid of any regard for the sanctity of human life as such; should sacrifice it as ruthlessly, when occasion demanded, as he sacrificed the rabbits, and cats, and pigeons he used in his frequent physiological experiments? Such a character was at least possible.

And then, with a sudden and ghastly distinctness, there rose once more, in vivid colours, before his mind's eye, a terrible picture—the picture of Begun Johanna of Deoband, Harry Chichele's ancestress in the fourth degree, lying on her bed with a smile on her lips, above the starving slave-girl's living tomb—and with a flash the riddle seemed easy indeed to solve. The man was a complex of jarring elements. On the one side, the sensitiveness, the delicacy, the refinement, the sympathy of European moral ideas; on the other side, the unscrupulousness, the treachery, the suppressed and concealed but ever-present cruelty of the Hindoo native. Of such strange components, in varying proportions, was Harry Chichele's character ultimately built up. What

wonder he should be as Ali knew him? Under ordinary circumstances, so Ali thought, the Englishman on the whole preponderated; but on certain occasions, when things so willed it, the nature and instincts of Begum Johanna came out strong in him; and the moment of the woman's death, Ali believed, was one of these worst and more awful moments.

He had little time however for speculating on his friend's psychology, for the next few days were full and busy ones for both Harry and Ali. Lizbeth, indeed, shortly began to mend, and as she did so her dog-like love for her wretched drunken mother, the one being she had ever known round whom the tendrils of her poor small heart could timidly twine themselves, seemed all to turn vicariously, with sudden energy, upon her new protector, Harry Chichele. He had been kind to mother—that was her one great thought; he had taken her in and cared for her at the hospital; he had tried to cure her though he hadn't succeeded; he had done his best at the end for mother. The child's gratitude was almost painfully fervid. It burnt with a clear and bright light in her very face. Such a misplaced feeling would have smitten a weaker man than Harry Chichele with profound remorse. But Harry, like the strong sinner that he was, accepted it all with good-humoured amusement as a tribute due to him. She was a poor, miserable, houseless, little stray, he said, laughingly; and as she was good enough to honour him with her friendly confidence, she should never have any cause to regret it. If Bill was unfortunately hanged—which little accident must not happen, if possible, for the woman had died distinctly of the fever, not of the assault—why, then, he would take over Lizbeth himself without consulting her natural guardian, the parish. If, on the other hand, Bill wasn't hanged, which happy consummation we must all strive to our utmost to bring about, why, in that case, doubtless, Bill could be persuaded by a solid solatium in coin of the realm (not exceeding forty shillings) to forego his profound parental feelings, and to make over Lizbeth in perpetuity to the care and guardianship of her present protector. So all would come out right in the end. Nothing could be simpler, easier or more perfectly satisfactory.

Not that the young doctor proposed to adopt Lizbeth; Harry Chichele had no such quixotic notions in his head as that. He would bring up the girl as a servant about the house, and perhaps in time, when she was old enough and wise enough, train her as a nurse under his own eye here at the hospital. She would be well provided for, but only as an act of pure generosity. He owed her nothing and he would pay her handsomely.

But there were many other things at the same time to occupy Harry Chichele's more serious attention. First of all, there was the inquest, and then there was the important question of the germs. As the eventualities would have it, of course, an inquest was necessary; and though Harry and the surgeon gave their evidence strongly in favour of death being due to fever alone, the coroner's jury, exercising its undoubted and cherished British privilege of setting aside cavalierly the opinion of the experts, and much moved by Lizbeth's graphic

description of the scene in the attic, which she reproduced with theatrical fidelity, brought in a verdict of wilful murder against William Wilcox, fish merchant, of Little Walpole Street, Marylebone, the husband of the deceased. Little Lizbeth was absolutely in her element in giving evidence, which she gave with a will against her drunken father.

"'E come in an' 'e says, 'I'll murder yer,' says 'e," the child deposed with such dramatic force, assuming the very tone and accent of the placidly smiling prisoner. "'I'll do for you,' says 'e. 'You see if I don't; you tarmagan. I'll teach yer to 'urt 'er. You're a beauty, you are. I'll swing for you Sal,' says 'e, 'I'll smash you; I'll murder you.' An' then 'e up with the bottle, and bangs it down like this—so; an' bashes in 'er head with a great blow; and the poor dear just lays 'erself back an' done this way; an' the blood come a' spurting out of 'er poor cut face; an' 'e stands up and he smiles, an' 'e smiles, an' 'e sticks 'is 'ands a-smiling in 'is pockets, an' 'e never takes no more notice or nothink. An' there 'e is, just as you sees 'im." No wonder a susceptible British jury, moved by this clear testimony to the prisoner's deliberate determination to kill his wife, should bring in a verdict of wilful murder.

Nevertheless, the verdict somewhat astonished and perturbed Harry Chichele; and Mohammad Ali noticed, with a deepening sense of uncomfortable suspicion against his English friend, that Harry was evidently uneasy in his own mind about it, as if he himself were in some way responsible for the eventuality. "It doesn't much matter, you know," he said apologetically more than once, in an awkward, shuffling way to Ali. "Coroner's juries always do prejudge a case against the suspected person. But it doesn't matter: the jury at the trial 'll set all that perfectly right. It'll take a more serious view of its responsibilities than a mere amateurish ineffective body like a coroner's jury."

"The palladium of British liberty is always absurdly emotional," Mohammad Ali answered, watching the effect of his words upon his hearer intently with his usual oriental keenness of observation. "I shouldn't be surprised for my part if they convicted the man, merely on the strength of the girl's evidence. It's a fine sensational scene, as she describes it—the fellow smashing in the sick wife's head with the empty gin bottle—and it loses nothing from that queer little imp's straightforward small mouth and theatrical manner. She'll produce an effect, I'll bet you a quid, upon any jury in all England."

Harry's face grew white and pasty. "Pooh, pooh!" he said. "The trial 'll be a pure formality. Judges are always sensible men. They're not carried away by mere emotion, like coroner's juries. They take care that due importance shall be attached to technical and scientific evidence. Juries always find in these cases according as the judges sum up. The man 'll get off on the capital charge, I don't doubt, though he'll receive what he deserves—six months in prison—for the assault and battery.

Nevertheless, in spite of all his airy protestations, Mohammad Ali could see clearly by the frequency with which he reverted to the subject, that Harry was by no means easy about it in his own mind, and

that his conscience pricked him, not indeed for accelerating the woman's death (if, as Ali more and more definitely began to suspect, he had in fact somehow accelerated it), but for helping to let unjust suspicion fall upon that worthless and abject creature, her husband.

However, being happily for himself a person of varied and many-sided interests, not apt to be wholly preoccupied by such small matters as the ultimate results of his own little action, Harry let the question lie by for the present, and occupied himself for the most part, meanwhile, with his investigation into the ultimate nature of the lodging-house fever germs.

At this congenial task he worked hard with his microscope in all his leisure hours, developing and observing those precious germs—the germs that had cost that miserable woman Wilcox the tag end of her unhappy and useless existence. He was greatly excited about the result—more excited, Mohammad Ali acutely observed, than even the intrinsic importance of the subject to science and himself could well account for. Mohammad Ali had a certain vague and unfounded suspicion floating through his brain that Harry, in fact, wanted the germs to justify his action—wanted them to yield an adequate result in order that he might not feel to himself he had wasted his crime all for nothing. When you so far depart from conventional morality as to kill somebody for an experimental purpose, you would at least like your costly experiment to turn out successful, rather than to end in a wretched fiasco.

As the investigation drew towards its close, Harry's excitement became almost painfully intense. He sat patiently for hours at a time with his eye at his microscope, never withdrawing it for a single second, and feeding himself through a tube with beef-tea, waiting to see the germs in their new "culture liquid"—the artificial medium in which he had placed them to aid their development—assume that jointed necklace-like condition which was the essential point for the proof of his new theory. If only that one last link in the chain of evidence could be supplied—if only segmentation would take place in the way he expected, the theory would have become a triumphant success, and he, Harry Chichele, would be the greatest discoverer in medical science since the days of Jenner and vaccination.

How small a matter, comparatively, was the death of that bloated drunken being!

He saw it all floating vaguely before his own mind, this vast future that awaited his grasp, this glorious destiny laid up beforehand by fate for himself—and Olwen. Nothing like it, he fancied in his heated imagination, had ever yet been done in modern medicine. Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood, Hunter's magnificent anatomical demonstrations, Sydenham's improvements in sanitary regimen—what were they all beside this fundamental question of the utter stamping out of infectious disease—the annihilation of fevers and smallpox and cholera? It was the beginning of a great sanitary millennium. He saw, in his waking vision, a Chichele society founded at Burlington House for the study and development of the new medical principles.

He saw a Chichele statue duly adorning the imposing front of its splendid edifice. He saw himself president of the College of Physicians, receiving distinguished visitors in his chair of office. And through the fabric of his day-dream, thus dancing visibly before his heated brain, as he pored for hours together, ceaselessly through the microscope, Olwen's graceful little figure flitted ever like a beautiful phantom, hallowing and consecrating the very crime by which he had made it all possible. He loved her now profoundly and unspeakably—for had he not dared, for her sake, the utterly unspeakable?

Then, again, as he sat in this heroic mood, waiting and watching, waiting and watching, waiting and watching for the final result, and just supporting himself on beef-tea and brandy, which Ali supplied him, sucked through the tube, at times a terrible wave of reaction would come slowly over him, and he would begin to fear, with a certain awful sinking terror, that the things were never going to segment at all, and that his glorious theory, from which he had hoped and expected so much, for which he had faced such horrible possibilities, was going to turn out in the end a dismal failure, and disappoint him utterly of his legitimate triumph. At such times his heart failed fearfully within him, and a gnawing horror, that was not remorse, nor yet repentance, but rather a mere wearied and sickening sense of futile criminality, took possession throughout of his nerves and muscles. He could hardly hold the focussing-screws of the microscope aright for trembling; he could hardly distinguish the dim and shadowy objects that flitted and flickered on the illuminated slide, for failure of vision to follow them properly.

Hour after hour went slowly by, and still the germs showed no signs or trace of jointing or dividing. Harry's excitement grew more and more intense with every moment. Mohammad Ali watched him narrowly. He sat with his eye fixed hard on the eye-piece of the instrument, and his hand trembling with nervous agitation upon the screw that alters and varies the focus. Cold perspiration gathered in large round drops on his clammy brow. No scientific experiment was ever before watched with such profound, such intense, such absorbing interest. At last he looked up curiously at Ali. "It would be horribly disappointing," he said, with some vain attempt at preserving his usual impassive scientific coolness, "if these beastly things were never to group or segment at all. One wouldn't like to think even that wretched woman's life was just simply fooled away, as it were, all for a stupid, unsuccessful experiment!"

"One would not," Mohammad Ali answered, drily. Harry started. Their eyes met for a single second. Mohammad Ali's were full of meaning. Then Harry withdrew his own uneasily, with a sudden movement, and applied them once more, weary with watching, to that fatiguing and disappointing eye-piece. He had said too much. He had spoken out his thoughts with too frank suggestiveness.

The field of the microscope grew giddy before his vacant gaze. He could hardly distinguish the tiny objects that swam so aimlessly and vaguely about in it. They were swimming in such enormous numbers

now—thousands and thousands of them joined together, in a sort of long-jointed beaded necklace pattern. So profound was his agitation, and so eager his desire to attain the wished-for result, that he looked at them long with vague speculation in his wearied pupils before it even began to dawn upon his dulled and numbed intelligence that this was really the very sight for which he had been so long and so ardently looking. They were segmenting! Yes, they were segmenting! Great chains and strings and criss-cross rows of them, in endless array, filling up the entire field of vision! A sudden thrill ran through and through him. It was too good to be true; too glorious, too magnificent! The theory was proved! The germs were jointed!

He dared not believe or trust his own eyes. He dared not think they saw aright. Everything swam before them so terribly now. Perhaps it was only an optical illusion. Perhaps it was fancy, hallucination, insanity. How could he be calm at so supreme a crisis of his life as this? Fame, reputation, Olwen's happiness, all trembled together visibly in the balance for a moment. He could not confide in his own observation for very terror. He could not hope it was really true. He called Mohammad Ali to help him look. "For Heaven's sake, come and see them, Ali," he cried. "Am I mad, or are they really jointed?"

The Indian put his eye somewhat sceptically to the eye-piece. "Yes," he answered at last, after a long gaze, with slow deliberation. "The theory is true. There can be no doubt at all in the world about it. The germs are lengthening out one by one into long-jointed worm-like strings. I can see them rapidly and distinctly segmenting before my own eyes this very moment."

Harry sank back exhausted in a chair. "Brandy! brandy!" he murmured faintly. Thank goodness, thank goodness, it was not in vain! Then his crime had not been committed for a pure chimera. Science was saved—and Olwen should yet be Lady Chichele.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FEW weeks only elapsed before the advent of that "pure formality," William Wilcox's trial for the wilful murder of his wife Sarah. Time flies when one's going to be hanged or married. Harry Chichele spent the brief interval in preparing his paper for the Royal Society, and working up in detail his great discovery, now almost secure of a triumphant recognition.

He worked it up with all his fiery energy, and in a perfect exaltation of exaggerated enthusiasm. The strange events of the last few weeks had combined to throw him into a vigorous access of feverish excitement. The theory possessed him heart and soul now; he could think and talk and write of nothing else, even in his daily letters to Olwen.

It was to him the one great fact of the age, the panacea for all the various ills of humanity, the vastest revolution ever yet effected in the whole course of medical science. He wrote about it in his paper with contagious zeal; he was drunk with the imaginary grandeur and magnificence of his own conception.

So the weeks rolled quickly and easily by till the evening before William Wilcox's trial. On that very evening he had arranged to read his paper to a crowded meeting of the Royal Society. He knew it would be crowded, for his name was already well known in scientific London, and the fact that he had made some new observations of prime importance on the germs of cholera and other epidemic diseases had already leaked out into medical society. Besides, he had woken up and found himself famous after the episode of the *Seamew*. All the world had been talking about the wonderful voyage of the cholera-ship; and he and Mohammad Ali had returned to London to discover themselves the heroes of an historical adventure. Everybody, indeed, who was anybody in the scientific world was there that night to hear him propound his great theory. He went down to Burlington House enthusiastic, well primed, and fully prepared; he took with him his slides and his germs and his liquids and his diagrams, and he did himself, as he always did, ample justice, both in the manner and the matter of his weighty contribution. Everybody listened in attentive silence. It was an able paper, ably delivered. At the end, the men of many letters, F.R.S. and D.C.L. and Ph.D., and all the rest of them, crowded forward eagerly to see the slides he had brought down in illustration of his novel theory. There was a general buzz and hum of discussion around the microscopes. The whole world of science looked and talked and reflected and debated. A moment of terrible suspense intervened for Harry Chichele. Then the greatest physiological authority there present, Sir Roderic Brinton, bending his brows to their severest arch, and pursing his lips up with critical dignity, said abruptly to the trembling young man, "I shouldn't like to commit myself too far at this early stage, Dr. Chichele, but there seems to me to be a great deal in it."

At that, the storm of assent began in earnest. The world had got its cue, and, as usual, acted at once blindly upon it. Here and there, to be sure, a doubter or a scoffer held aloof conspicuously in sceptical hesitation, or assumed the favourite scientific attitude of suspended judgment through a pair of neatly-balanced and critical eye-glasses. But, on the whole, the sense of the society was evidently in favour of Harry Chichele. Germs are catching; and as one man after another crowded up with sympathetic smile, and told him in varied language what a big thing this really was, or how important he considered the final result of these beautiful and accurate investigations of years, Harry grew fairly intoxicated with delight at last, and longed to retire, sated and wearied, from this increasing tide of polite congratulations. The room whirled and twirled around him. It was late, however, before he could get away from the infinite hand-shakings at Burlington House; and then Mohammad Ali bundled him somehow into a cab,

and drove him off, inebriated with the subtle fumes of success, from the giddy scene of his earliest and great scientific triumph.

When he reached home, he sat down the first thing, drunk with love and flattery, and wrote one line only in pencil to Olwen. "My darling,—The meeting has gone off well. The germs have triumphed. The theory turns out a complete success. Even Sir Roderic gives in his adhesion, and everybody declares it a marvellous discovery.—Yours ever, H. C."

Then he went to bed and lay awake the whole night through, tossing and turning, and thinking to himself of the remote results of his glorious theory. It was indeed a splendid and entrancing prospect. The world would now be freed from its worst terrors, and Olwen should ride in her own carriage.

Next day the inevitable reaction set in. It was the morning of William Wilcox's trial. Harry rose fatigued from his sleepless couch, dressed himself slowly with evident carelessness, and lounged round late in a morning coat to the Central Criminal Court to answer to his subpoena.

The trial was already in full swing. A fat little judge, with face half buried in his ample wig, filled the bench. Twelve good men and true, of undoubted respectability, but, to guess by their looks, of most doubtful intelligence, occupied the place usually assigned to the peers of the prisoner, empanelled by law and the sheriff's caprice to judge of the culprit's guilt or innocence. In the dock stood the amiable periwinkle merchant himself, jaunty, cold-blooded, and unconcerned as usual. In his own heart, William Wilcox, fish merchant, of Little Walpole Street, Marylebone, thought himself guilty. How, indeed, could he think otherwise? He knew he had smashed the gin-bottle across his wife's head, he knew he had made her face and neck bleed profusely, he knew she had died (presumably of the wounds) next day in the hospital; and not being by nature given to casuistry or skilled in nice medical inquiries as to the cause of death, he had very little doubt in his own simple and vulgar mind that, as he himself would have delicately phrased it, he must have "done for Sal" that night with the gin-bottle.

Little Lizbeth, now decently clothed and in her right mind, was the first witness called for the Crown; and the Crown, as Harry Chichele saw to his immense relief, was evidently very lukewarm in the prosecution. That impersonal entity, in fact, had made its mind up from its previous inquiries that Bill had not really murdered his wife; and it was therefore prosecuting him chiefly for form's sake, to carry out the finding of the coroner's jury. But it didn't believe one bit in its own case, and it put forward its witnesses with the perfunctory formalism of an unwilling advocate. Little Lizbeth, however, soon showed that she for her part by no means coincided in the Crown's lenient view of the matter. The child was clear, emphatic, and damnatory. Judge and jury saw at once from her excited manner that Lizbeth by no means loved her father, and that she regarded him chiefly as the wicked person who had brought about her mother's death. She was not vindictive,

but she was righteously indignant ; and at sight of Bill, standing there in the dock, doggedly and brutally jolly as ever, her indignation burned up bright into white heat of angry accusation. At first she could hardly be got to answer counsel's questions coherently, so firm-set was she in her one vigorous and distinct but too generalized opinion that "it was 'im as did it." After a while, however, the Crown lawyers brought her by gentle and dexterous pressure to a more tractable frame of mind, and she told her story then, though evidently much embarrassed by the constant interruption of question and answer, with remarkable coherence, straightforwardness, and animus. So far as Bill's safety was concerned, the last point weighed at least as much against him as either of the others ; for nothing would have impressed the jury more than this evident belief in the prisoner's guilt on the part of his own orphaned and ill-treated daughter.

After Lizbeth and the policemen had been duly examined, Harry Chichele was put into the box by the defendant's counsel. As his name was given, the fat little judge's round face lighted up agreeably with a pleasant smile of instantaneous recognition. The *Times*, in fact, had had a laudatory leader on Harry's great discovery in that morning's issue, with a full account of last night's meeting at the Royal Society. Judges are even (if possible) a shade more omniscient than most other people ; and the judge observed, leaning forward towards Harry, with an appreciative smile on his broad features, that he supposed they might take it for granted Dr. Chichele was the celebrated expert in zymotic diseases, of whose ideas so much had been written of late. Harry modestly admitted the charge of having engaged in some recent researches on that difficult question. The jury pricked up their ears and endeavoured to assume an intelligent and attentive expression of countenance, as befits twelve respectable British householders, who are about to hear, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the technical evidence of a scientific witness.

As long as the examination in chief continued, Harry Chichele got on swimmingly enough. To be sure, he asserted a little too vehemently his belief that the wounds on the face had nothing at all to do with the cause of death, and that the woman would have died all the same anyhow, whether Bill had hit her with the bottle or not ; for the jury, which admired vehemence in little Lizbeth, naturally disliked it in Harry Chichele, as savouring too much of scientific arrogance.

But when it came to cross-examination, counsel for the Crown, a well-known and scientific Q. C., now warming up to his work with professional interest, and seeing a chance for the favourite forensic amusement of heckling and badgering a technical witness, began with a perfect torrent of questions as to Harry Chichele's peculiar medical ideas and theories ?

Was he a specialist in zymotic diseases ?

Harry immediately admitted, with a smile, that he was.

Was he an enthusiast as to their effect and universality ?

Well, yes, in a sense, he must candidly allow that he thought much of their power and importance.

Had he recently conducted a series of experiments upon germs derived from this very case?

He had.

Was it essential to the proof of his *so-called* theory—with a prodigious force of sarcasm thrown into the stress laid on the word “so-called”—that the woman Willcox should be held to have died in the last stage of collapse in lodging-house fever?

Undoubtedly it was.

Had Harry stated that conviction of his own as an ascertained fact last night at a meeting of the Royal Society? (Where, indeed, the distinguished Q.C. had with his own ears heard him so state it).

He had (somewhat nervously).

The distinguished Q.C. smiled a profoundly meaning smile, and glanced, with immeasurable import in his look, at the jury. The jury, puzzled, but dimly conscious of what was expected from them, smiled back responsive, with an assumed air of the most penetrating wisdom. The judge shut his small fat eyes and ruminated inwardly. Bill, who had woke up with a start for awhile, at the first part of Harry's evidence, into a passing show of interest in the case, derived from a sudden gleam of conviction that the doctor cove was going, by some miracle or other, “to help him out of this 'ere blooming predicament,” now relapsed once more, with sullen good humour, into his primitive indifference, and gave up the case as wholly unworthy his exalted consideration.

The more the Q.C. plied Harry with questions, all tending to show that he was prejudiced in favour of a belief in death from zymotic diseases, and against the guilt of the woman's husband, the more vehement and earnest did Harry become, and the more profoundly and unreservedly did the jury distrust him.

At last, in answer to one of the Q.C.'s final probing questions, Harry Chichele cried out with petulant eagerness, “The man is wholly innocent of this charge. To hang him for it would be nothing short of a judicial murder!”

The judge opened his closed eyes sharply. The jury whispered and nudged one another. The eminent Q.C., putting his head a little on one side, with a calm, cool, malicious smile, observed in a sarcastic voice to the witness, “You may stand down now, thank you. After that very rhetorical expression of your private opinion, there's nothing more I have to ask you.”

Harry Chichele stood down, flushed and indignant. Counsel for the defence, observing his condition, thought it wisest, in the prisoner's interest, not to re-examine. Indeed, the young doctor was terribly perturbed in his soul. He knew he had managed his evidence badly. He knew he had made a mess of the business. He knew he had done more harm than good. He knew he had succeeded in prejudicing the jury against the prisoner's case. He felt his face grow hot and fiery, while those big beads still stood cold and chill on his forehead. He would have given anything to leave the court that moment, but some inexorable attraction compelled him to wait and hear the verdict. He could not tear himself away without it. Cost what it might, he must

see this thing out to the bitter end. He must know whether justice was going to make him, in spite of himself, into a double murderer.

But as he listened to Mohammad Ali and the house-surgeon giving their evidence with far more coolness and deliberation than he had done, his hopes began to revive once more, and the terror of that awful possibility of the verdict to be raised for awhile from his agonized conscience. For the two other medical witnesses, having no special case of conscience to guard them, could bear their testimony far more quietly and soberly in every way, and as they had also no special theory to support, it was less easy for the hostile counsel to make light of their important evidence. They both agreed with Harry that the wounds had nothing at all to do with the woman's collapse, and that the real cause of death was most undoubtedly chill and fever. The jury nodded sagaciously among themselves, and Bill once more assumed afresh some languid interest in this indifferent amusement.

When all was said and done, the rotund little judge summed-up, with luminous impartiality of the familiar stereotyped non-committing character. It was not denied (with fat right-hand forefinger solemnly uplifted) that severe wounds had been inflicted by the prisoner upon the deceased with a broken gin-bottle. It was not denied (with abrupt change to the left forefinger) that deceased at the time of this murderous assault was already lying in a precarious condition from natural causes, with lodging-house fever. The evidence of the child (recapitulated at full with demonstrative quill) went far to show that the prisoner had been animated by homicidal intent, and had deliberately designed to kill his wife with his singular but extremely effective weapon. The only real question for their consideration was, had he or had he not succeeded in carrying his design into execution? If they thought the wounds had accelerated death, then, and in that case, they must, of course, bring in a verdict of guilty. But if they believed the medical evidence, and if they thought death would have occurred when it did occur under any circumstances, then they must naturally find a verdict in accordance with that more lenient and merciful opinion. Of the medical witnesses, Dr. Chichele was a physician of immense and undoubted scientific attainments; it would be for the jury to decide (with a knowing smile from the fat small eyes) how far he might have been influenced in his views on this case by his well-known and almost sentimental attachment to the zymotic diseases. The zymotic diseases, in fact, were at one and the same time his forte and his foible. Dr. Mohammad Ali, again, was a medical gentleman from Hindoostan, who had taken the oath after the fashion of his faith, on a copy of his sacred book, the Koran, and who had given his evidence, the judge must say, with great care, straight-forwardness, and fidelity. It would be for the jury, however, to decide how far he might have been influenced in his ideas on the subject by his close connection with his distinguished European colleague, Dr. Chichele. The same remark would, of course, apply, *mutatis mutandis* (at which the jury looked particularly clever), to the other medical witness, Mr. Macpherson, the house-surgeon of the hospital. Judicial wisdom, adjusting its wig, left the matter wholly

to the discretion of the jury, trusting that, on the one hand, they would not attribute excessive importance to the antipathies of a child of tender years and small experience, nor, on the other hand, attach undue weight to the emotional utterances of an amiable and accomplished professional gentleman, whose task it was to preserve life under all circumstances, and who, perhaps, might be tempted by pure goodness of heart to carry too far that natural bias into a peculiar sphere of thought and action in which it was no longer justly applicable.

Primed and enlightened by this lucid statement, the jury retired to consider their verdict; and Harry Chichele, with parched lips and haggard eyes, broken down by the reaction after last night's unnatural triumph and exaltation, was left alone for twenty minutes in that crowded court with his own conscience.

Two men stood there together, indeed, both equally on their trial, though not both in the same manner. The prisoner at the bar stood cool and careless, his hands in his pockets, unmoved as ever. But Harry Chichele, the true culprit, leaned for support faintly against the rail of the dock, and awaited with feverish and breathless anxiety the return of the jury. His face was pale and white as death. A terrible fixed expression sat upon his features. His eyes turned eagerly towards the door of the jury-room. An awful moment of doubt tormented him. He knew whose case was most truly in jeopardy. He could never let that unhappy man be hanged in his own place. It was for his own verdict that he was really waiting. His own verdict—his own, and Olwen's.

For if the jury brought it in guilty, it would be all up with himself and with Olwen.

CHAPTER XV.

FOR twenty minutes the suspense was terrible. Harry waited there, worn and pale, haggard with sleeplessness, hearing his own heart beat each moment in his breast meanwhile, and drawing his breath deep and irregularly. What an eternity it seemed, that long, slow interval, while the twelve good men and true in their own room sat debating the case at their leisure by themselves, and deciding with thorough-going British stolidity upon their verdict of life and death for William Wilcox and Harry Chichele. He hardly dared to glance around him even, so awfully did the horrible chances of mishap weigh upon his soul. He kept his eyes firmly fixed the whole time upon the prisoner at the bar, who had so much less to lose by the verdict than he, and could lose it all ten thousand times more carelessly. If only Harry could have thought him guilty! If only he could have believed it was the wounds that killed her! But he knew him to be innocent—he knew him to be innocent; and to let an innocent man suffer at the hands of offended

justice in his own place would indeed have revolted the inmost and most sacred feelings of his nature.

It is hard to have such a character as his ; hard to be able to sin so boldly, and yet to pry for it like the veriest tyro.

What would he do if the jury brought in a verdict of guilty ? He did not know. He could not determine. How, or where, or when to confess the truth, and to save that brutal ruffian from amply-merited—yet unjust—punishment, he could not decide ; but save him he must, and at all hazards. Strong as he was, he was not hardened. It would be terrible for Olwen ! Death for Olwen ! But justice must be done, though the heavens fall in upon us. Come what might, he must secure plain justice for the man Wilcox.

At last the jury filed slowly back into their accustomed place. A hushed stillness fell upon the court. Harry Chichele, pale as death, leaned eagerly forward on the rail to listen. Even Bill himself, though impassive still, and desirous as ever to preserve his wonted equanimity, yet showed signs of a certain suppressed internal anxiety to hear their decision. A heightened colour flushed his florid cheek, and the corners of his heavy square-set mouth were twitching nervously.

“Gentlemen of the jury, are you all agreed upon your verdict ?”

“We are.”

“Do you find the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty of wilful murder ?”

Dead silence prevailed through the room as the foreman answered in slow and measured tones—

“We find him guilty.”

At the words, an awful horror darkened for the moment Harry Chichele's eyes. He clutched the rail to keep himself from falling. The room reeled and swam around him. His heart was beating violent now, and his breath came and went in short sharp snaps, with feverish rapidity. He hardly heard the rest of the proceedings. It was as in a dream, vaguely, that he thought he saw the judge, with solemn formality, assume the black cap, and pass sentence of death upon William Wilcox for the murder that he himself had really committed.

Things had indeed come to a terrible pass. When Harry Chichele accelerated the departure of that miserable creature in the cot at the hospital, he had never dreamt of such an end as this. He had taken it for granted that the clear and certain medical evidence which he and his colleagues could produce in court would exonerate her husband from all possibility of blame in the matter. He had imagined that a jury would accept his statement of the cause of death as absolutely infallible. And now—he opened his eyes in terror. A ghastly phantasmagoria floated before his face. Solemn sounds echoed dimly in his ringing ears. It was the judge's voice passing sentence. “And there hanged by the neck till dead,” it said with grave emphasis. “And may the Lord have mercy upon your soul !”

May the Lord have mercy upon your soul ! May the Lord have mercy upon your soul ! Whose soul ? That creature Bill's ? Nono, his own ; Harry Chichele's. For it was Harry Chichele's condemnation

that he heard echoing through that phantom court; the judge was really passing sentence, he felt, not upon Bill, not upon Bill, that miserable ruffian, but upon him, upon him—upon the real culprit, Harry Chichele!

A buzz and bustle possessed the room. The prisoner was led down doggedly from the dock. The crowd melted away piecemeal, its excitement over, from the body of the court. A fresh prisoner was brought up to the bar. New witnesses crowded into their place by the door. Counsel and judge, beginning over again, assumed fresh attitudes for their altered parts. Another drama was being enacted now on the scene of that ever-changing theatre. But Harry Chichele stood there still, incapable of movement, thought, or action; and Mohammad Ali stood beside him, with his hand set hard upon his trembling arm, half pitying the man in his alarm and terror. For a while he seemed as if rivetted to the spot. At last Ali led him gently away, hurried him once more into a hansom at the kerb, and drove him back, silent and moody, to the Regent's Park Hospital.

In his rooms, little Lizbeth met him, jubilant. "Well, they're a-goin' for to 'ang 'im," she said triumphantly. "I'm just glad as they're a-goin' for to 'ang 'im. Some of 'em say the Queen'll pardon 'im, becoz o' the medical evidence bein' for 'im. But I 'ope she won't. She's got no call to. They'd ought to 'ang 'im for murderin' mother!"

The child's exclamation brought a gleam of hope to Harry's bewildered mind. He had been too pre-occupied even to think of that obvious loophole. A pardon! A pardon! The Home Secretary was no British juryman. He, at least, was an educated gentleman; a person of responsibility; a man of sense and experience and judgment. He would recognize at once it was a foolish miscarriage. He would listen to the voice of medical science. He would hear what those who knew had to say upon the subject. He would prevent this gross perversion of justice.

Burning with eagerness, he turned to consult Mohammad Ali. "We must see the Home Secretary this very day," he cried. "The man must not be hanged. It's wicked. It's incredible."

"'E smashed 'er 'ead in," Lizbeth put in manfully, "'an 'e said 'e'd do for her. 'E meant for to kill 'er, and they'd ought to 'ang him for it. That's wot the laws is for, ain't it?"

"No zeal, my dear fellow," Mohammad Ali answered, endeavouring to restrain him. "You lost the case in court by too much zeal. Don't lose it out of court by the same indiscretion."

But Harry was not to be restrained now. His whole life concentrated itself at once on that one point, with the usual fiery concentration of his nature when once aroused. He lived only, for the moment, for that single purpose, to get that atrocious verdict set aside, and to secure a free pardon for William Wilcox.

For the next week, indeed, he lived for nothing else. Of course, he was met at every turn by red tape in endless profusion; but when Harry Chichele once took a thing fairly into his head red tape was not a strong enough material to prevent him from carrying his design into

execution. One morning shortly after, as he walked with fiery earnestness down Whitehall, he met Ivan Royle, now a different man, strolling up from Westminster to Pall Mall. Ivan, just back in town, was struck at once with the change in his appearance. "Why, my dear fellow," he cried, "who has painted you all out, and put you in again several tones lower?"

Harry explained with eager heat the nature of the situation—suppressing, of course, the unessential detail of the ice-bag.

His evident sincerity impressed Ivan most favourably as to his humane sentiments. "The black man was wrong," the painter thought to himself, with generous appreciation of his rival's merits. "Chichele's a kind-hearted man at bottom.

At last, by almost superhuman efforts, he broke through the endless barriers of red tape that block up the doors and gateways of Whitehall and Downing Street, and obtained a personal interview from the Home Secretary for himself, the house surgeon, and Mohammad Ali.

That was a real step in advance. The medical evidence was too unanimous for even a Home Secretary to disregard. When Harry Chichele emerged into Whitehall once more that morning it was with a positive promise from the elusive and evasive right honourable gentleman that her Majesty would be graciously pleased to pardon William Wilcox for the crime which, in fact, he had never committed. That is the utmost to which British justice can ever nerve itself. So firm and inflexible and infallible is it, that when once it has found a man guilty, right or wrong, the angel Gabriel himself could never prevail to have the prisoner declared really innocent. British justice can never reverse a sentence; it can only grant a free pardon. It saves its consistency at the expense of its victim.

Armed with even that insufficient assurance, however, Harry Chichele stepped forth into Whitehall another being. He felt a free man now. A terrible burden had been lifted from his shoulders. Olwen was saved, and he himself need never confess that—well, that unfortunate little indiscretion of the ice-bag.

Once more the reaction was sudden and violent. Harry Chichele's gaiety became, in fact, ludicrously extreme. Mohammad Ali noticed it with profound suspicion. Why should the man have thrown himself so fervidly into this work of mercy? Why should he have embraced it with such fiery eagerness? Why should he exhibit the recoil and relief of his strained feelings with such boyish exuberance of delight and freedom? It looked all the same way. Surely there was the sense of personal danger and personal escape expressed in his violent and overwrought emotion.

When they reached home, Harry flung himself down in his easy-chair, laughed and talked with almost hysterical hilarity, and astonished Ivan Royle, who had dropped in to see his Polperran friends, by the unwonted boisterousness of his conversation. The cloud was fairly lifted from his life now, and he and Olwen might be happy together. After all, he almost wondered he had been such a fool as to take things to heart so seriously as he had done. He might have known the Home

Secretary, at least, would listen to reason. These politicians are sensible men—men of the world—not mere pettifogging pedants like the English judges. Everything was going so well, now, that he could hardly understand his own terrors and alarms yesterday. The case was finished ; the man was pardoned. His theory was proved. The Royal Society had virtually accepted it and stamped his doctrine with the seal of their approval. He would be rich and famous and honoured still ; and before long he would doubtless be able to marry Olwen.

The intoxication of success had come over him once more. The little episode of the ice-bag was already dismissed with sublime indifference from his brain and his conscience.

For, after all, it was all right now. No harm had been done—or none worth speaking of ; and endless good had accrued in the end to humanity at large, and to himself and Olwen. To be sure this awkward little hitch had intervened, as hitches will sometimes unexpectedly intervene in all human designs and operations. "The best-laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft agley," as the poet has told us. But that was an accident—a passing accident ; the solid good remained untouched behind it. A glorious means of averting epidemic disease had now been found ; and he and Olwen might be all the happier for it.

"And yet," he said aloud at last, after a long pause, to Ivan Royle, "this business has given me a lesson, anyhow. I shall steer clear in future of all these murder cases. They're too much anxiety for a professional man. They involve such a lot of trouble and bother."

"But how can you steer clear of them ?" Mohammad Ali interposed with a puzzled air. "You couldn't possibly have avoided this one, for instance. It was thrust upon you, without your seeking. You didn't know it would end in a trial."

"True," Harry answered, a little uneasily. He was far too candid in speaking out his thoughts. It was so hard to bear in mind always how others looked at this little matter. He must be more guarded in his language in future, or that sharp fellow, Ali, with his Indian acuteness, would begin to suspect him of knowing more than he said about it.

There was one comfort, however ; let Ali prick up his ears and pick up his hints as much as he liked, he could never have more than the merest and vaguest suspicion in the matter. The crime itself—he supposed conventional people would call it a crime in their absurd way—was absolutely trackless. The ice was melted. He had unstitched the waterproof bags ages ago, and not a particle of evidence anywhere remained to bring the facts of the case home to him. He had managed it cleverly ; very cleverly. When a bungler tries this sort of thing, you know, he makes a miserable mess of it, of course ; but with the cool, collected brain and hands of the man of science, success in a physiological and personal experiment of this sort becomes almost an absolute certainty.

He was quite proud of the result now. He had never, in his whole professional course, managed a difficult and doubtful case more cleverly and successfully.

As he sat in his rooms a little later with Ivan Royle and Ali, by that evening's post a letter arrived for him, "On Her Majesty's Service." Letters on her Majesty's service were uncommon events with Harry Chichele; and after the manifold changes and turns of circumstances, with their varying emotions, in the last few weeks, this one caused him no little momentary anxiety. He looked at it cautiously front and back, before he dared to break the big red official seal, or to open and read what it had to say to him. Could that perfidious Home Secretary have played him false after all, and violated his doubly-pledged right honourable word in the matter of the pardon? Could he mean to hang the man Bill? Was this whole sickening and ghastly episode to be lived right over again from the very beginning? Harry Chichele turned deadly pale at the bare idea, and his delicate fingers trembled visibly as he tried to tear open that mysterious letter. Mohammad Ali, still watching him close with his cat-like gaze, noticed how he fumbled and boggled over the seal, and how his bloodless lips were quivering tremulously with suppressed excitement.

At last he tore the letter open. Its contents were short, plain and startling. This was what Harry Chichele read, to his utter surprise, in the large, round, legible official hand on the big sheet of clean white foolscap with the ample allowance of folded margin:—

"SIR,

"I am directed by the Right Honourable the Secretary of State for the Home Department, to inform you that her Majesty has been graciously pleased to approve of your name as first occupant of the new professorial chair of medical ætiology recently founded at University College, London. The emoluments of the chair will be £800 (eight hundred pounds) per annum.—I have the honour to be, Sir,

"Your obedient servant,

"RALPH ORMEROD."

Harry dropped the letter, speechless with surprise. So this was what that curious little episode had brought him. He saw Sir Roderic's finger in it all. How could he ever have been such an idiot as to take so much to heart the small inconveniences it had momentarily entailed upon him. Great enterprises invariably require skill and patience. But this was the reward of his courage and his research. After all, the old maxim holds good as ever, still, and wisdom is justified of all her children.

By his own hand, by his own hand, he had done it. A fool would have let the opportunity slip, and allowed the miserable obscure German to walk off unobserved with the honours of discovery. A coward would have shrunk from putting the well-designed plan into execution, and would have failed at the last moment in the courage of his convictions. But he, Harry Chichele, by his own hand, had done it. He had boldly conceived and successfully carried out that admirable experiment for proving or disproving the truth of his theory. He had

planned wisely and ventured well. And, verily, now he had his reward—a Royal professorship of eight hundred per annum.

Ivan Royle, directed by a nod from Harry, was reading the letter. “My dear fellow,” he cried with an hearty and heartfelt shake of the hand, “I’m awfully glad! I congratulate you most sincerely on your good luck. You deserve it all. But what in heaven’s name is medical ætiology?”

CHAPTER XVI.

WHAT is one solitary human life to a true philosopher? In a week or two more the “little episode,” as Harry always called it in his own mind, was as clean dead and buried and forgotten as Sal herself in her nameless pauper grave at Kensal Green Cemetery. When once the turmoil and trouble of the trial were over: when Bill much to his own blank astonishment, had duly received his free pardon; when a couple of pounds lawful coin of the realm, transferred from Harry Chichele’s pocket, had purchased the entire fee simple of little Lizbeth, besides setting the periwinkle business once more afloat as a going concern, with new properties and decorations throughout—when all these things had satisfactorily happened in turn, Harry Chichele had so much to occupy his mind in other ways that he almost ceased to think of the little episode itself at all in the hurry and bustle of his manifold engagements.

For first of all, there was the new professorship to undertake—that mysterious professorship of the ætiology of disease, the very meaning of whose name he was obliged to explain with profuse learning to everybody he came across for the next six months. “What the dickens is ætiology?” became to him so familiar a question at clubs, as “Oh, Dr. Chichele, do please tell us what ætiology means!” became in drawing-rooms, that before long he learnt to recognize instinctively the very purse of the lips that ushered it in, and could answer the outspoken query offhand before it was even fairly propounded. The chair of ætiology, it may be readily imagined, is a very serious chair indeed for a man to fill; and Harry felt in his heart that so young and inexperienced a person as he was must do his level best in eye-glasses and deportment to fill it with becoming grace and dignity. So the “duties of his office,” as he loved to say with much gusto, occupied the larger part of his time and energy at present—at least, the larger part of the residue left over after the alternative and equally important duties of his onerous daily correspondence with Olwen Tregellas.

For love, too, is an exacting taskmaster; he imposes upon whomever he catches in his firm clutch no mean amount of literary labour. And now that these elusive germs were fairly settled, and the question of the pardon fairly solved, and the chair of ætiology fairly set up in working order on its own four solid and sensible legs, Harry Chichele, looking about him with a freer glance at the world at large, began to

reflect with a sigh of relief that a place had at last been created worthy of Olwen, and that Olwen herself might now not ungracefully be invited in her own good time to come and fill it. He mentioned this reflection casually one morning to Mohammad Ali; and Mohammed Ali, shaking his head in a somewhat oracular fashion, answered that he had expected as much himself, and answered, Harry somehow fancied to his surprise, as if he didn't exactly relish the prospect either.

Next day Mohammed Ali called early at Ivan Royle's studio in old Kensington. He found the painter in his velvetene coat and Rembrandt cap, busily engaged in putting the finishing touches to a Cornish picture. It was a pretty little glimpse of dark red rock and blue sea in a tiny cove, not far from Polperran, and the foreground was occupied by a light and graceful girlish figure in a flowery summer dress, shading her eyes with her small white hand, and gazing eagerly to seaward for some expected vessel. On an easel by the side stood the original study of a Cornish girl, from which the figure itself had been filled in—a careful and delicately appreciative study of Olwen Tregellas. There was poetry in every detail of her pose; there was soul in every line and turn of her features.

Mohammad Ali looked at it long and smiled sadly. "Still working at her, Royle," he said at last, with a gentle and almost melancholy cadence.

"Still working at her, my dear fellow," Ivan Royle replied, looking up from his palette; "and I shall work at her, I suppose, more or less now, as long as I remain in the land of the living. A face like that, once seen, burns itself into the very fabric of a painter's brain; he can never long keep it out of his thoughts or his canvas."

"Harry Chichele's going to be married," Mohammad Ali broke out brusquely. He made no sort of introduction or apology for his sudden speech. He flung the fact, as it were, full in Ivan Royle's face, and then waited for him to resent it and retaliate.

"So I expected," Ivan answered with a quiet sigh, standing back a pace or two off from the easel, and inspecting his handicraft with modest complacency. "It can't be helped. Perhaps—I don't know—it's all for the best. Perhaps he's worthier of her, Ali, than I am."

"It is *not* for the best," Mohammad Ali replied bitterly. "It's for the worst, for the worst, very much for the worst. Royle, my heart sinks within me to think of it. I distrust that man. I disbelieve in that man. I fear that man, for Olwen Tregellas. Can't we do anything anyhow to prevent it?"

"I don't see that we can," Ivan answered after a short pause. "She loves him and prefers him. Her will is law in such a matter. It would be ungenerous and unmanly of me even to try to interfere between them, supposing I saw my way to doing it. Why do you mistrust him, Ali? Why do you disbelieve in him? Have you seen or heard anything fresh to set you against him? Or is it still only the old Begum business?"

Mohammad Ali took a seat by the window, and began by very delicate side hints to impart his latest suspicion to Ivan. He didn't

say what he thought or fancied outright, but told his story carefully and suggestively, dwelling upon each suspicious point exactly as it had struck him. Before he had got half way through with it, however, he became dimly aware that the tale was falling quite flat on Ivan's simple, straightforward English nature. The Englishman listened with polite incredulity. He could not believe so much harm of any one so transparently kind-hearted and well-meaning as Harry Chichele. When Mohammad Ali, by well-pieced hints and scattered fragments of Harry's conversation, had fairly brought out the true nature of his profound suspicion, Ivan clapped his hand on the Indian's shoulder with a smile of something like genuine amusement, and exclaimed heartily, "My dear friend, this won't do. You're on the wrong tack—on the wrong tack entirely. Your cleverness positively overshoots itself. You're allowing your own predilections, and your own subtlety and ingenuity of mind to run away with you and lead you at last into very queer and impossible places. This kind of thing may be believed in India, you know, but it's too diabolically and horribly clever to go down in England."

He didn't add—how could he?—that in his own heart the very fact of Mohammad Ali's having hit upon such a black suspicion had prejudiced him a little against the Indian himself. Nobody had a right to start such ideas about other people. Even if a white man had hinted so ghastly a thing as that to him about anybody else, it would have given him a worse opinion of his informant; when a black man does it, all the profoundest and cruellest race instincts of our nature are aroused against him, and we say to ourselves with our European complacency, "No Englishman would ever have invented anything so grotesquely wicked and so utterly inadequate."

Ivan Royle, indeed, recoiled a little from Ali's suggestion, as everybody always must recoil from the imputation of serious crime against a man with whom we have ever lived on terms of intimate familiarity; and the recoil made him look more favourably than before upon Harry Chichele's pretensions and wishes. In his own manly, straightforward English way, he was quite ready to confess himself beaten, in love or war, without casting imputations on his rival's character, or listening to horrible, ill-founded hints that told against his probable future conduct. He laughed down Ali's recondite speculations; and Ali himself, seeing how Ivan's bright and sunny nature could brush away the very imputation of evil, felt himself for the moment half reassured by the interview, and ventured still to hope the best for Olwen.

If only he could have forgotten the story of the Begum!

Two days later Harry Chichele stepped round in exuberant spirits to his friend's studio to inform Ivan that a date had now been fixed for the wedding, and to ask him whether, as the happy event was to take place at Polperan, he would assume the arduous duties of best man in memory of their first meeting in Cornwall.

Would fate intervene to prevent the marriage? Fate can never be trusted at a pinch. So it came to pass before many weeks were over that Olwen Tregellas was really married to Harry Chichele.

Harry had altogether forgotten now everything about the little episode. He had never from the first had any shadow or fear of detection—detection, indeed, was morally impossible: and now that the difficulty about Bill was well overcome, and little Lizbeth decently settled in life, he had ceased to trouble his philosophic head any more about the matter. Being by nature an even-tempered and light-hearted person (save when profound emotions intervened to stir his soul to its inmost depths), he had cast aside the entire subject once for all; and now, intoxicated with success and in the full flush of love and happiness, he looked and really was as handsome, open, and proud a bridegroom as any girl within the four sea walls of Britain could wish to marry.

Ivan Royle, too, accepted his doubtful duties as best man (for no authority has ever yet been able satisfactorily to define the precise nature of a best man's functions) with much manful kindness and good nature. Olwen had blushed a little, indeed, when Harry first mentioned to her that he had selected Ivan for that particular post; but Ivan himself had greeted her on his arrival with so much frank cordiality and genuine good feeling that Olwen gladly recognized in him a true friend, and forgot her first little timid hesitancy.

Among the wedding presents, by far the handsomest was a set of antique oriental dessert knives and forks—solid silver, with exquisite inlaid ivory handles—bearing in rather arabesque letters on the cover of the box a neat inscription, "H. O. C.—from Mohammad Ali." Harry Chichele looked at them with admiration and surprise. Mohammad Ali was comfortably off, that much he knew;—the old native banker at Saharanpur, proud of his handsome Europeanized son, had always made him a most ample allowance, drawn from the wealth of Ormuz and of Ind;—but Harry had hardly imagined till then that the Indian doctor could afford so valuable and costly a present. As a matter of fact, Mohammad Ali could not afford it; he had stretched a point for this special occasion, and wasted a whole month's income on a fitting gift for Olwen's wedding. Harry looked at the costly oriental things with a softening heart. On one's wedding day, one sees the world through rose-coloured spectacles.

"After all," he said to himself gaily, "Ali's a good fellow, and a great deal fonder of me than I ever thought, or he wouldn't have bought me such a beautiful present. Of late, I've been inclined to fancy sometimes he wasn't quite so friendly and pleasant as he used to be. I almost suspected him, indeed, of suspecting me! Pooh! What nonsense. I laid my plans too deep for that. Conscience makes cowards of us all, I suppose; though not, thank goodness, of me, at any rate. Pretty reflections these for a man at his wedding! It's a comfort to know I was mistaken... after all, and that Ali's really the same good fellow and good friend as ever.

He never even thought of it as a present to Olwen. So much do we all read things from our own side alone. So much does every one of us misinterpret the springs of action in the motives of others.

Another very pretty wedding present of Olwen's was a little water-colour of a Cornish garden, with a girl's light figure standing out in the

foreground, between clambering sprays of clematis and jasmine; and visitors from a distance whispered to one another, "It's her own ideal portrait, you know, by Mr. Royle, the well-known artist, who was Dr. Chichele's best man, and whom he and the Hindoo gentleman, with the Mahommedan name, saved, you remember, from the wreck of that famous cholera ship last autumn. You must have read all about it at the time in the papers.

But during the course of the wedding breakfast, when Harry Chichele's health was proposed in a most eulogistic speech, the Hindoo gentleman, with the Mahommedan name, felt a curious shudder come creeping over him, and a cold tremour down the spinal cord overtake him with a rush, at a painful thought that just then flashed unexpectedly across his mental horizon. For all of a sudden, in the midst of all that din, bustle, and gaiety, as everybody was talking and thinking about Harry Chichele, and what a wonderfully clever fellow he had proved himself, and what important medical discoveries he had made, and what a great and famous man he was and would be, that old suspicion about the cause of Sarah Wilcox's death recurred with startling vividness, as if by direct external suggestion, to Mohammad Ali's pre-occupied mind; and like a flash of lightning it came over him to think that on that fatal night he had never felt Harry Chichele's other hand—the hand he had kept so long concealed in his pocket and laid at last upon the dying woman. And then, with the instantaneous and instinctive conviction of his Arab nature, the hideous truth came clearly home to him in a burst of intuitive certainty, that, in spite of all these fair speeches and praises, they were all assembled there that day to see Olwen Tregellas married to a murderer.

It was too late now to think any more of it. She was married to him at last—irrevocably married to him. The moment for action was long gone past; there was only time in future for regret and repentance. For Olwen's sake, he must never again breathe his suspicions to any man. For Olwen's sake, he must still try to believe in her husband.

The champagne bubbled and beaded merrily in his glass. Everybody was smiling and bowing and nodding. The word went round, "The Bridegroom's Health." All the guests raised their glasses and drank. Mohammad Ali raised his with the rest. When they set them down again, there was one glass untasted among them. "You haven't drunk happiness to the bridegroom," the lady beside him murmured low with a smile. Ali answered her with an evasive prevarication. "I'm a Moslem," he said, "and you know the Koran forbids the faithful to taste of wine." It was the first time since he came to England he had ever pleaded Islam as an excuse for abstemiousness.

And with that double evil augury, Olwen Chichele's married life began.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE first twelve months of Olwen Chichele's married life passed quietly and happily enough. Of course she and Harry did not live entirely in an earthly paradise. Ante-nuptial expectations of a perpetual honeymoon break down on trial before the stern realities of mundane house-keeping. There are no "books to pay" in the forecast of the betrothed. Still, when judged by the more modest and realistic standard of the actually married, the two young people jogged along very happily together in their matrimonial harness. If their wedded life was not at all times quite as ecstatically blissful as they had imagined it would be in the days when they wandered side by side, with thrilling hearts, among the gorse and heather at dear old Polperran, at least they were as averagely comfortable and sympathetic with one another as any ordinary husband and wife can ever expect in this work-a-day world of ours. Harry was really and truly fond and proud of his sweet little wife; and when he took her out to dinner at great houses in London, and heard the oft-whispered inquiry, "Who's that awfully pretty dark girl in the white dress over yonder?" his bosom swelled within him with the pride of possession at the usual flattering answer, "That's Mrs. Chichele, wife of the clever doctor fellow who invented germs, and so forth, don't you know; her husband's professor of something-or-other unpronounceable at University College."

Olwen, too, for her part, was exceedingly happy. Harry seemed kindness and goodness itself to her; and although, of course, like most other women, she had to come down in time off that earlier pedestal of the engaged angel to walk the solid earth, in due course, a prosaic married woman of flesh and blood, much preoccupied with weighty questions of the weekly bills or the new housemaid's Sunday out arrangements, she, nevertheless, found him always as attentive and demonstrative as a mere husband can ever, in the nature of things, be expected to show himself. But every woman is potentially a duchess. Men sometimes rise to the occasion; women always do; and Olwen bore her blushing honours lightly on her—as lightly as if she had been accustomed all her life long to give her arm to a real live philosopher as the servants announced "Dinner's ready, mum," and to discuss the Absolute and Unknowable between the courses with an eminent psychologist and a distinguished member of the French Academy.

And the germs? Well, the germs continued to survive, and to pervade society much the same as ever. Epidemic diseases were not yet altogether stamped out, it is true, and diphtheria and scarlatina still floated invisible upon the summer breeze very much as they had done since the beginning of time, before the woman Wilcox had been offered up on the altar of humanity as a vicarious sacrifice to the all-conquering

germ for the remainder of her species. Still, the theory—the theory was proved, and that, after all, is the great thing. In time, you know, we shall proceed to practice.

This is generally the way with all great medical discoveries. They go up like a rocket and come down like a stick. First, they are cocksure to revolutionize science. Next—though very important within a certain limited range of diseases, don't you know—they are not quite so universally valuable as some people were rash enough to imagine at the first outset. Last of all, they are quietly forgotten, and relegated without one word of recantation to the infinite limbo of exploded remedies. In this natural life-history of a medical theory, Harry Chichele's great and successful germ doctrine was rapidly reaching the second stage of modified appreciation.

Nevertheless, the professorship still remained intact, a very tangible and visible monument of the brilliant hopes at first aroused by the promulgation of "the Chichele hypothesis." Eight hundred a year, payable quarterly, and a chair in University College, London, no doubt consoles a man for a certain amount of disappointed forecasts and lessened ideals for the future of humanity.

The Chicheles had taken a comfortable house, not beyond their means, at Happy Hampstead. Harry's little patrimony—his final share of Begum Johanna's ill-gotten wealth—helped to eke out the income from the chair, and between the two they lived in a way which to Olwen seemed almost culpably luxurious, and which even Harry, with his more expensive metropolitan tastes, considered extremely gentlemanly, convenient, and satisfactory.

In the new household at Queen Anne's Road, Hampstead, little Lizbeth formed a conspicuous component element. When Harry Chichele married—a step which little Lizbeth already regarded with some disfavour, as introducing an unknown factor into the family of which she now considered herself an aliquot part—Lizbeth had quietly taken it for granted that she would migrate, as a matter of course, like the Begum and the Emir, Harry's Persian cat, to the new home as soon as it was established. For little Lizbeth was now a fixture, identifying herself completely with Harry Chichele, and utterly forgetful not only of Bill but also even of her dead mother. Indeed, Lizbeth's affections were curiously strange and dog-like in their character. She didn't seem capable of recognizing more than one special friend at a time, as a dog has always only one real master. And now that Sal was dead and gone, Lizbeth accommodated herself with canine fickleness and canine fidelity to the whims and fancies of her new owner. Her position in the household was somewhat undefined. She was not cook, or parlourmaid, or scullery-girl, or housemaid. She fulfilled more or less the nondescript functions usually performed by a boy about the place; but she regarded herself, for her own part, strictly in the light of Harry Chichele's personal slave and chattel. Olwen, she tolerated in a general vague and indefinite way, as a dog tolerates his master's family and his master's friends; but Harry Chichele she loved and obeyed, watching closely for his merest word or nod, and ready always when-

ever he wanted her, with her keen little eye answering at once to his merest passing idea or fancy. If Harry went out, it was Lizbeth who handed him his stick or his umbrella, and brushed his hat, and took his last orders, and closed the door lightly behind him. If Harry came in, it was Lizbeth who recognized his ring at the bell; Lizbeth who lay in waiting to open for him at once; Lizbeth who set his slippers by the fire, and brought him the letters or the evening paper. At first she had considered Harry Chichele mainly as the person who had been kind to mother when mother was dying. Now that feeling had gradually merged into another—a more personal and possessive one; and it was for his own sake, as her master and owner, that Lizbeth clung to the young doctor, with the intense clinging of her strangely perverted savage little nature.

Mohammad Ali also lived not far away. He, too, dogged his lady like a faithful spaniel. True to his determination to watch well over Olwen's happiness, come what might, he had taken rooms at a house hard by in Queen Anne's Road, and pretended to practice in a half-amateur way among the comparatively large Indian and Mohammedan connection which lives and shivers in modern London. But the practice, after all, was mostly a transparent pretence for all that. The greater part of Mohammad Ali's time he really spent in Harry Chichele's experimental laboratory, where he worked away contentedly at the germs and infusions, amply satisfied if, once in a while, it gave him a stray chance of seeing Olwen, and observing the course of her current relations with her husband. Not a few of the delicate and minute experiments which gained Harry Chichele so much kudos when embodied in those striking and original papers of his at the Royal Society were really due, as intimate friends knew, in great part to the handy and careful manipulation of the patient, self-forgetful Mohammedan doctor. But Ali, indeed, cared less than nothing for fame; he was glad to help Harry to the utmost of his power for love of the occupation and for love of Olwen. If Harry gained credit for anything his Indian friend had done, why Olwen was pleased at it; and if Olwen was pleased at it, Mohammad Ali had more than his due share of reward and repayment for all his passing toil and trouble. Kismet, kismet. He lived for Olwen.

The first Christmas after Olwen was married Ivan Royle took up his quarters for a time at an hotel at Cannes. It was a cold December in England—colder than even the English want—and there was skating on the Serpentine before Christmas day. Such a winter is too much altogether for our Indian brother. The cold nipped up Mohammad Ali. For the first time in his life he felt his lungs getting out of order, and judged it prudent to strike south at once, on a visit to Royle on the Mediterranean. So he moved away early in the year, and pitched his tent, like his Semitic forefathers, on the sunny shores of the inland sea.

A week later, as Harry Chichele sat at breakfast one morning, grumbling a little at a passing sore throat, and poring over an enthusiastic and descriptive letter from his Indian friend, he laid down his

coffee with an air of determination, and, looking up from the page he was reading, cried abruptly, "I say, Olwen, let's start to-night for Cannes and sunshine."

Olwen's colour heightened somewhat. She hardly liked this hasty resolve. Ivan Royle was at Cannes; and she liked Ivan Royle so very much that on the whole she would rather have avoided him. "That's very sudden, Harry," she answered, with a conscious flush. "Why go so hurriedly? Don't you think you'd better wait and turn it over?"

But Harry, on his side, rather preferred precipitate action. He hated indecision and shilly-shallying of every sort. When all the elements of a problem are once fairly set before you, it's womanish to hesitate and debate and haggle over detail. A philosopher sees at a glance where the indications point, and makes up his mind at once and irrevocably. "Why no," he replied, "I don't see it. Why shouldn't we start offhand to-night? Everything goes for it straight as a needle. The south's the place for a Christmas holiday. Lectures don't begin for another three weeks. Why muddle and mug in foggy, muggy, muddy London, when one can breathe pure air and see bright sunshine and hear birds sing on the Riviera? Listen here to what Mohammad Ali says, little woman. 'Blue skies, green grass, purple sea, and perfect basketsful of Banksia roses! The hotel garden's an exquisite picture—reminds me of Polperran in August weather, except that even at Polperran we didn't have huge agaves and aloes towering with their crowns of golden blossom to the cloudless sky, or date-palms recalling the valley of the Jumna. There are attractions, too, in the way of society; friends of Royle's who are well worth knowing. Why don't you come, and bring Mrs. Chichele? She had a nasty cough, I fancy, when I left London,'—Ali's quite right, Olwen, you have a cough; I've noticed it myself sometimes in the morning; how awfully observant these Indian fellows are, to be sure—and a week or two in this delicious summer-like air would set her up thoroughly and bring the Cornish roses back into her cheeks again.' Upon my word, Olwen, Ali's an awfully kind and thoughtful fellow. I believe he's right, after all. A week or two in the south would do you worlds of good. There's nothing I love like an unexpected trip. Why, it was at ten minutes' notice, you know, that I went to Polperran. I met a friend in the Strand, and I said to him, 'I'm going down to Cornwall to look for adders. Where shall I find 'em?' And he said, 'At Polperran.' So I went right off on his recommendation, and I found you there instead of an adder—so there's a precedent for you, if you like, darling." And he leant across and kissed her hand tenderly.

"You mustn't repeat the performance at Cannes, Harry," his pretty little wife replied, smiling. "I want you all for myself now. You must find nobody to take my place there. But how on earth shall we ever get the packing done? When do you mean to leave? There's positively no time for it."

"Oh, nothing easier," Harry cried offhand, already deep in the study of Bradshaw, which he had fetched, as she spoke, from the drawer in the sideboard. "Here you are: Leave Charing Cross, 8.5 p.m. ;

arrive Paris, 5.50 morning. That's our train. Bundle a few things into a portmanteau for me ; take your own best bib and tucker, a dinner dress or two, and a bonnet for yourself ; wire across to Ali to secure us rooms at the hotel at Cannes ; stop a couple of nights on the way south ; and there you are, as plain as a pikestaff. Run upstairs after breakfast, darling, and get ready at once. No need to make a mountain out of a molehill."

When Harry said a thing he generally meant it. So they packed hurriedly, and took the night mail that very evening for Paris. Little Lizbeth stood at the door to see them off, very particular about Harry's comforter, and specially anxious that he should have a foot-warmer to keep his throat from turning worse. As the cab drove away Lizbeth fairly burst out crying. "'E's goin' right across the sea," she said, "an' perhaps 'e won't never come back again."

At the bookstall at Charing Cross Harry paused to buy himself a book for reading on the journey. Olwen had chosen her own already—a shilling dreadful—the last thing published. Harry glanced about among the paper covers for something or other a little more to his mind. After conning over the titles of three or four, he found, at last, a volume to suit him.

"What have you got?" Olwen asked, as he turned to pay for it.

"Oh, just Seeta Mayne's last. You've seen it reviewed. They say it's superb. 'The Price of Wisdom.'"

"Always that woman! I never did care for Seeta Mayne," Olwen rejoined, half pettishly. "She seems to me so strained, so high-flown, so quixotic, so unnatural. Her ideas of life are all impossibly high. She wants to live in a Utopian world of magnificent abstractions. She prevades infinity too much for me. I prefer people who confine their attention, as a rule, to the solar system and their own planet."

"Ah, that's because you don't care for pure romance," Harry answered sententiously, "Of course *you* don't see as Seeta Mayne does. For her, all earth and air and sky and ocean are purpled over with 'the light that never was on sea or land.' She looks at everything with the eye of a born poet. You can't expect, you know, to read the world as a woman like Seeta Mayne reads it."

A sharp little knife ran unseen, as he spoke, through Olwen Chichele's tender heart. In a moment, a memory had broken suddenly over her. Twelve months ago ; eighteen months ago ! A picture rose before her dim eyes of how she and Harry had wandered alone among the Cornish heather, and how she had spoken like things of Seeta Mayne, and how very differently he had then answered her. But that was eighteen months since ! Every wife on earth has felt that pang, some rightly and some wrongfully. Olwen Chichele felt it with bitter keenness then, and treasured it up, as women will treasure up their dearest wounds, in a special chamber of her soft small bosom.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THEY broke the journey at Paris and Marseilles, leaving only the short and beautiful bit along the Mediterranean as a sort of *bonne bouche* for the third morning. It is a lovely ride, that sun-smitten strip of rocky coast, between the mountains and the sea, from Marseilles to Toulon; then on through the glorious hills and dales of the Maures inland to Fréjus; and finally among the magnificent red porphyry peaks of the ramping Esterel to Cannes itself, where they were to end for the time their hasty journey. Olwen, who had never been in the south before, was in ecstasies of enjoyment at every turn. There was so much to see that was new and delightful—the hoary green olives, with their gnarled trunks; the vineyards straggling down the steep hillsides; the orange groves nestling with their broad shade beside the dry pebbly beds of the winter torrents. It was all like a glorious fairy tale to Olwen; not even in her own beloved Cornwall had she ever seen anything one half so beautiful.

There was only one slight drawback to her pleasure; she couldn't get Harry fully to enjoy it with her. Time after time, indeed, at her exclamations of surprise and delight he would lay down his book on the seat for a moment and step by her side to the open window to look out upon some glorious sea-girth headland, or some sunny stretch of olive-clad hillside, terraced with endless human industry. But except when she seized him bodily by the arm and cried, "Oh, Harry! Harry! You must look! It's just too beautiful!" he could hardly be got to leave his reading; and once, at the very moment when they were passing a lovelier peacock-blue bay than any yet, he put down his novel impatiently and said with a sigh, "Seeta Mayne is really a most wonderful writer."

"Oh, bother Seeta Mayne!" Olwen couldn't help exclaiming in half angry tones. "Did you ever see anything so exquisite as that, Harry?"

"It is lovely," Harry answered, far too grudgingly to satisfy his little wife's enthusiastic mood. "What melting zones of colour on the calm sea! "Seeta Mayne has a scene placed just along this coast, you know. Her description of the country's simply wonderful. You never read anything like it Olwen; you must look at it yourself when we get to Cannes."

Olwen was privately piqued in her own mind that Harry should think so much more of Seeta Mayne's second-hand description than of her own delight at the exquisite scenery which was just then unrolling itself in long panorama before their own two very eyes. It was really too bad of him. She determined not to call his attention to anything again, however lovely the something might happen to be, just to punish

him for his indifference ; and even as she made her mind up to that stern inner resolve, a grey rocky crag, with clambering grey houses hanging on its stairlike flanks, and a mouldering grey citadel towering to the sky on its topmost platform, broke her resolution before it was even well formed ; and, seizing her husband's sleeve once more in her excitement, she cried aloud with delight, " Oh, Harry, Harry, do look ! Here's a lovelier bit than anything at all, we've seen, so far. It just appears as if it had been all cut out of a single solid block of greystone ; it's so precisely like throughout in shape and tone and shade and sentiment ! Isn't it just wonderful ! "

" Beautiful ! beautiful ! " Harry answered, unconcernedly, and betook himself once more to that horrid novel of his.

Ivan Royle and Mohammad Ali had told them by postcard to the Louvre at Marseilles (where the Chichele's had slept the night before) that they would walk across the Esterel by the footpath from Cannes and pick them up at St. Raphael station. But when the train stopped short at last beside a glorious bay, looking across broad belts of intervening sea to the ragged schistose cliffs of the St. Tropez headlands, and the regulation blue notice board on the platform showed distinctly the name of St. Raphael, no English artist and no Indian doctor were anywhere to be seen among the scanty passengers. They must have changed their mind or missed their path, Harry imagined : so the Chichele's made their way alone to Cannes, without further disturbing themselves as to the non-appearance of their promised fellow-travellers.

At the hotel they learned from the proprietor on their arrival that Ivan and Ali had indeed started early that morning to meet them on their way. Monsieur's friends must have miscalculated the time or mistaken the road, the proprietor fancied. It was a long walk from Cannes to St. Raphael—a long walk among the trackless mountains. Monsieur's friends would doubtless return by the next train, too late for *table d'hôte* ; they were often belated.

So Harry and Olwen washed off the dust of travel from their faces at their leisure, and descended at once to the large and well-filled *salle-à-manger* for dinner.

They remembered that dinner for ever afterward. Opposite them at the table sat a very striking and handsome woman, who at once attracted and seemed instinctively to rivet Olwen's closest attention. She was tall and well-built, with faultlessly clear-cut and regular features—a countess of the old school, Olwen thought to herself, looking almost as if she had just stepped down by accident from some canvas of Sir Joshua's, or Romney's, or Gainsborough's. Her forehead was remarkably high and white and even, and she wore her hair brushed back from the brow on every side, so as to show to the full its very unusual breadth and expansiveness. Her complexion was of a certain indescribable clear olive tint, not in the least dark, yet faintly creamy, like the earliest stage of coffee-coloured laces. Her eyes were large, grey, and splendid. When they lighted upon you with a rapid flash they seemed to pierce you through and through, and read intuitively your inmost nature. A placid smile played for the most part about her

beautiful mouth, as though she felt herself serenely at peace with mankind and with the universe generally. If any fault could have been found with her face, it would, no doubt, have been that her lips were perhaps just a trifle too thin; her arched eyebrows just a trifle too regular, her chiselled features just a trifle too cold, her delicate small chin just a trifle too strong and rigid and projecting. But only a cynical critic could have raised these hypercritical objections to an exquisite profile; the face as it stood was an eminently beautiful one, in the high calm intellectual style of feminine beauty.

As Olwen looked at her again and again, she soon observed the stranger's hands were almost as expressive and high-born looking in their own way as even her features; there was something about the long and graceful tapering fingers that irresistibly reminded one, at first sight, of Lely's frail and exquisite models. Her figure was perfect; her bust well moulded, but far from voluptuous; her arms and neck, just faintly suggested rather than seen through her simple dark grenadine dinner dress, were of sculpturesque roundness and grace of outline. Even her costume had something quaint and artistic in it that seemed to smack remotely of the last century; her lace was fine and of antique make, and her hair was arranged with some dim reminiscence of the style of arrangement one sees in portraits of the time of Vanloo and Boucher and Fragonard. Everything about her at once attracted and repelled Olwen; the little Cornish rosebud felt awed and abashed in the presence of this majestic full-blown flower of queenly womanhood.

The countess, as Olwen called her at once in her own mind with girlish simplicity, was the first to speak. Olwen herself would never have ventured upon taking such a liberty with so great a lady. "You're new arrivals," she said, with a royal smile, "just come to-day! We were expecting friends from England ourselves by the same train, but they haven't turned up, I see. You've had a lovely journey, I should think, along our beautiful coast in this glorious sunny weather." She spoke somehow with an expansive wave, as if the coast belonged to herself personally, and as if she had specially arranged with the authorities of the atmosphere for the supply of glorious weather at will, to her private order.

Olwen flushed with pleasure at her friendly notice, so grand and beautiful and condescending was she. "Yes, indeed," she answered, "it was just *too* lovely; I never in my life saw anything to equal it."

The countess flooded her with the light of her eyes. "I'm glad you like our scenery," she said simply. But she said it with the air of one whose own handiwork is being duly appreciated.

"Do you live here always, then?" Olwen ventured to ask, in somewhat trembling accents.

"Always, in winter. In Switzerland for half the year, and here for the other half. I'm a confirmed sun worshipper, faithful still to the oldest and most poetical of human creeds. I hate the mists and fogs and drizzles of London. I love not your fogs, your bogs, and your frogs. And, besides, I fly hither from English despotism."

"From English *what?*" Harry asked, looking up in surprise with a hasty glance from his soup-plate.

"From English despotism," the countess repeated in the same sweet measured tones as before, transfixing him in turn with those clear grey eyes of hers. "You have a sovereign in England, an inexorable potentate, whom I try to avoid for one half at least of every twelve-month. Of late, I've avoided her altogether. No other despotism existing on earth can be so watchful or so exacting as that English sovereign of yours. A Russian czar may dictate to his subjects their political creed and their religious opinions. An oriental despot may order about his sultanas and his Circassian slaves; may tax his people's salt and ghee and marriages; but he doesn't interfere in every petty action of his lieges in their daily life, or poke his nose in at the windows of their huts at the moment when they're engaged upon the domestic dinner. Now, your English potentate does all this; her Argus eyes are ever upon you; her spies are watching you all day long; nothing is too small or too private for her notice; nothing is too sacred for her open criticism and her public animadversion." The countess paused and looked hard at Harry. Olwen felt herself called upon to answer something.

"And her name?" she said, with some little wonderment.

"Is Mrs. Grundy," the countess retorted sharply. "You English, in solemn conclave assembled, fall down and worship Mrs. Grundy. All other despotisms are feared and hated; but Mrs. Grundy is faithfully served on every side by willing victims. Queen and Parliament would be powerless to touch the minute matters of every-day existence which Mrs. Grundy regulates for you all with a rod of iron. No legislative enactment could ever compel you yourself, for instance, to wear clothes which you didn't like, or to buy a bonnet which you didn't think 'so very becoming.' Mrs. Grundy issues her sumptuary edict, and forthwith you array yourself in an inflated balloon, or gird yourself round with iron cage-work, or drape yourself in skirts that cling about your limbs like a wet bathing dress. Your husband would like to wear a soft felt hat instead of the orthodox shining chimney-pot in the streets of London—but what would Mrs. Grundy say? The thing's impossible. The eyes of England and of the Grundys are upon you. It would be pleasant to ride home to-day on top of the omnibus; but Mrs. Grundy walks, ten thousand strong, down Regent-street, the Strand, and Piccadilly; and in deference to her understood opinions, you take a cab instead and go home half-a-crown the poorer. For my part, I hate Mrs. Grundy. She drives me an exile from my own land. I prefer to escape her by spending the winter here on the Riviera, and flying for the summer to the breezy heights of free Switzerland."

"I wonder who Mrs. Grundy is?" Olwen murmured, inquiringly.

"Don't you know?" the countess cried, with an accent of surprise. "I thought everybody knew that! Why, she's just the farmer's wife in the old play of 'Speed the plough'—nothing but the next-door farmer's wife—no more, I assure you; the personification and embodiment of

petty everyday female tyranny. This ceremonial government, which sums itself up in Mrs. Grundy's name, is really and truly a petticoat government, a system of life devised, maintained, enforced, and carried out solely by women. Men go to Parliament and make the laws. What does that matter? Women stop at home and constitute collectively that grand impersonal absolute despotism which sums itself up as Mrs. Grundy. There are three kinds of government in the world, invented respectively by men, by priests, and by women. Political government—the masculine form—hurts nobody; after all, it has no effect. Ecclesiastical government—the epicene form—hurts us somewhat; but we've lived it down, and we can, all of us, escape it if we choose nowadays. Ceremonial government—the feminine form—presses upon us every day of our lives, from the cradle to the grave, with all the petty minute persistence and persecution of women. It is woman's invention, and it bears upon its face the unmistakable mint mark of feminine intolerance."

"You're hard upon women," Olwen said with a smile. "For my part, I like my own sex."

"I don't," the countess responded frankly. "Man is really worth a hundred thousand of us. If you want breadth of view, go to man for it. If you want wide sympathy, go to man for it. If you want geniality, toleration, expansiveness, justice, go to man for them. But if you prefer narrow-mindedness, intolerance, petty criticism, restricted sympathies, harsh injustice, positive cruelty, go to woman for them; go to woman, and verily I say unto you, you will not be disappointed."

She poised an olive on the end of a dessert fork as she spoke, and glanced up at Harry for approbation.

"Most women would be afraid to admit it," Harry replied complacently. He liked to be included in the ranks of a sex which possessed so many delightful characteristics.

"Most women, true; but I am not most women. I am myself, and I have the courage of my convictions," the countess answered with a delicious smile. For the rest of dinner time she addressed her remarks mainly to Harry, and Olwen was glad of it. Such conversation she had never heard before. It subdued and annihilated her. The countess flowed on like a majestic river. Her speech never faltered or hesitated for a moment. It came out always in an even stream with all the regular ease and balanced rhythm of a practised orator's.

As they finished their last raisins and oranges, the countess rose with stately complacency. "Shall we go into the drawing-room?" she said to Olwen, sweeping up her train with her hand as she spoke. Olwen, afraid of her and half-repelled still, attempted to follow. The countess motioned her imperiously in front with a regal wave of her beautiful hand. "Married ladies first," she said; "Mrs. Grundy wills it." Olwen obeyed, but half mistrusted herself even for obeying. She must be a countess in her own right then, Olwen thought to herself; she had yielded precedence to a doctor's wife on the ground of being a single woman.

They had scarcely seated themselves in the comfortable easy chairs

by a small table in a retired corner, the countess just toying lazily with her Louis Quinze fan, and Olwen, for the very first time in her whole life, feeling dimly conscious of a certain awkward doubt as to how to manage the conduct of her hands, when the big door from the main corridor opened suddenly, and in walked Ivan Royle and Mohammad Ali.

Ivan advanced towards them all at once, with his frank smile and hearty welcome. "How well you're looking, Chichele," he cried, delighted. "And Mrs. Chichele, too, as fresh and bright and light as ever. This is just jolly. We're so enchanted to see you. Ali and I barely missed the train at St. Raphael by thirty seconds. Lost our way among the hills, and couldn't get right again. However, it doesn't matter, I see, for you have made yourselves acquainted even in our absence. You couldn't be mistaken, of course," turning to the countess, "as to this being Harry and Mrs. Chichele."

The countess bit the top of her fan in dubious acquiescence. "On the contrary," she said at last, after an awkward pause, with marked coldness, "I concluded these *couldn't* be your friends, Ivan. Indeed, the very first thing I ever said to them was just that—that the people we expected this afternoon hadn't turned up. To my mind, Mrs. Chichele doesn't at all answer to the description you gave me of her. You always used to be so bad at description."

Ivan and Olwen both coloured up with some embarrassment. The countess perceived it, and having shot her bolt and seen it fall on the weak spot, she was woman of the world enough to retrieve her position at once with feminine strategy. "I didn't expect any one half so young, and girlish, and fresh," she went on, with a charming smile towards Olwen. "You know, Ivan, you hadn't in the least led me to look out for a Spenserian idyl in pink muslin. So, of course, we haven't dreamt of introducing ourselves to one another. Now, my dear boy, will you have the goodness to be master of the ceremonies?"

Ivan laughed an uneasy laugh. "Mrs. Chichele," he said, "you will, of course, have guessed that this is my cousin, Miss Seeta Mayne, to whom you have been talking. You know, Seeta, Harry Chichele is a sworn admirer of all your novels."

Miss Mayne bowed; the countess had disappeared from the scene forthwith as if by magic. "Not to know Dr. Chichele," she said in her courtly grand manner, still wielding the fan as if it had been a sceptre, "argues one's self unknown, I'm afraid. But you must remember," she added, half apologetically, "I see so little in my humble way of the great scientific world of London."

Olwen noticed in a moment two small points—first, that Seeta Mayne thought only of Harry and entirely ignored his poor little wife as a mere adjunct of the clever doctor; second, that she knew as if by instinct exactly where to flatter her husband's vanity. In a vague way, Olwen was already afraid of this great, clever, beautiful woman—afraid of her, not, of course, for herself, but for Harry—for Harry.

Three minutes after, while Harry and Olwen were exchanging notes by the centre table with Mohammad Ali, Seeta Mayne drew Ivan Royle

aside into a quiet corner. "My dear boy," she said to him in a bantering undertone, yet half accusingly, "how on earth could you ever dream of so absurdly misleading me about that poor little Mrs. Chichele of yours? Why, Ivan, you told me she was pretty!"

"So she is," Ivan answered stoutly, with his plain, simple, masculine common-sense. "The prettiest girl I ever saw anywhere."

Seeta Mayne's lip curled an almost imperceptible and delicate curl. "That insignificant baby-faced little doll!" she murmured with a bland and tolerant smile. "My dear Ivan, you will never be a judge of beauty in women! A poor little pink-and-white atom like that! Pretty indeed! And you call yourself a painter! May the shade of La Fornarina mercifully forgive you!"

And she drew herself up to her full height, no Fornarina that ever lived on earth looked in her time one half so beautiful.

When Olwen sat for a moment by the olive-wood fire in their own room late that evening, she said, as lightly as she could, but still with a faltering heart, to Harry, "Well, Harry, and what do you think of Seeta Mayne now you've actually seen her?"

"Think!" Harry echoed, stirring the fire with a dash into a rousing flare of wild sparks, "there's only one thing one could possibly think, my child, that she's just exactly what one would have expected her to be from her grand writings. But, Olwen, did you ever in your life see such eyes? They seem to pierce right through and through one."

CHAPTER XIX.

"I'm rather tired at last, after so much travelling," Olwen said at the early breakfast next day. "Don't let's go anywhere or do anything particular this morning, Harry. Let's wait to explore the lions of the place till we've got over the fatigue of the journey a little."

"All right," Harry answered with his kind smile. "I don't care a button what we do, darling, now we're once here in this delicious balmy air and sunshine. It's just glorious, isn't it? Just look at the roses peeping in at the window, for all the world like dear old Polperran, Olwen; and the great fluffy golden mimosas hanging in a perfect California of bloom on the boughs over yonder!"

After breakfast, Harry lighted a cigarette, and they lounged out together, hatless and bootless, on to the garden terrace. To Olwen, everything was rich with the charm of novelty. The big cactus plants, with their pale yellow flowers and prickly pears; the great aloes, with their stout, sharp, needle-like points; the clipped date palms, with their long and slender feathery foliage; the green lizards that sucked in their sides till the ribs showed through their shagreened skins; the birds, the butterflies, the insects, the tree toads, all alike were beautiful and

interesting. She could easily loiter away a whole long day in that enchanted garden.

At a turn of the path, as they strolled on, round a clump of oleanders in full bloom, they came suddenly upon a trio of their acquaintance. Mohammad Ali, Ivan Royle, and Seeta Mayne were pacing up and down the sunny terrace towards the sea before them.

Olwen's eyes fell at once instinctively on the countess. Miss Mayne was dressed this morning in a graceful and elegant flowery garden dress, with a certain delightful Louis Quinze reminiscence about its antique brocade-like design and Pompadour make-up. Her costume was lighter and breezier than before, but she looked none the less every inch a countess for all that. Only she was a countess dressed for a *fete champetre*, at Fontainebleau now; not a countess attired, as she had seemed last night, for a royal reception at Marli or the Trianon.

"So you're down at last," Ivan Royle exclaimed, coming up and grasping their hands heartily. "Ali and I, and my cousin too, breakfasted half an hour ago or more; but we wouldn't have you called—at least, Ali wouldn't—for we thought Mrs. Chichele would probably be a little tired this morning after her long journey."

"Oh, no, I'm not the least bit tired," Olwen cried at once, with true West country politeness—your West country folks can always be firmly depended upon to say whatever is most nice and proper under all circumstances. "At least, that is to say, hardly at all to speak of. I never mind travelling much, Miss Mayne, because I'm so little used to it, I suppose, do I, Harry?"

"I've no doubt, darling," Harry answered, demurely, "Miss Mayne will accept your unsupported testimony."

Olwen blushed. She didn't know why, but she was annoyed with Harry for just then saying just that to her. It was a frequent habit of hers, as it is of most wives, so to appeal to her husband for corroboration of unimportant statements; and Harry usually laughed off her little appeal with this stock speech of his, which relieved him from the trouble of either correcting or confirming her original proposition. But before Seeta Mayne she didn't exactly like to be thus put down. She somehow felt she must stand upon her dignity with the famous novelist.

"I'm so glad you're not tired," Seeta Mayne responded, with a charming smile—and when she chose she could smile deliciously; "for I've just been planning a little excursion of my own for us all this morning. I want to take your husband, Mrs. Chichele, to my favourite spot away up among the heights of our glorious Esterel. It's a lovely bit. I showed it to Ivan, and he's made a simply exquisite sketch of it for next year's Academy. I'm anxious you should go there for your first trip, that Dr. Chichele may get a general *coup d'œil*, and see at once what manner of country it is that we have to offer him."

Dr. Chichele, always Dr. Chichele, Olwen didn't half like it. She hesitated a moment. "Is it far?" she asked. "Because—" And there she broke off suddenly. After what she had already said to Seeta about not being the least bit tired that morning, it would look like self-

contradiction now to plead fatigue as a sufficient excuse for not joining the projected party.

"Oh no, it's not far," Seeta Mayne answered with careless ease. "At least, not for moderate walkers; and I suppose, Mrs. Chichele, after your Cornish moors—Ivan has told me all about them, of course—you don't make much of a couple of dozen miles or so.

Mohammad Ali, with his quick perception—like a woman in instinct and a man in feeling—came at once to Olwen's assistance. "I don't think, Harry," he said gently, "Mrs. Chichele's sufficiently recovered from the fatigue of her journey to venture upon such a serious excursion this morning."

Ivan Royle seconded him in haste. "There's no hurry, Seeta," he said, half aside. "Chichele and Mrs. Chichele are going to stop here three weeks, and the Esterels mean to remain for ever. There'll be plenty of time to go another day. The eternal hills will always wait for one. Let's put it off till Mrs. Chichele feels in somewhat better trim for mountain climbing."

Seeta drew herself up proudly to her full height. "I wouldn't for worlds ask Mrs. Chichele to accompany us," she said, with frigid politeness, "if the fatigues of a journey from Marseilles to Cannes have so profoundly worn and overcome her. I made the mistake of imagining from what you so often told me, Ivan, that Mrs. Chichele was a confirmed pedestrian; was accustomed to strolling for indefinite distances over endless expanses of Cornish moorland. I pictured her an English Atalanta, perpetually roaming through illimitable spaces. I didn't know she was one of the numberless sufferers from the impaired health of the modern Englishwoman. She must excuse my error. By all means let her rest and recruit herself in the garden of the hotel to-day. You'll find the garden a most delightful lounge"—turning to Olwen, whose face was now a bright crimson—"so restful, and quiet, and retired, and bowery. Ivan, you're always a good Samaritan. You'll stop at home and look after Mrs. Chichele, I know—one good turn deserves another; and he's never tired of telling me, Mrs. Chichele, how very kind and attentive you were to him over yonder in Cornwall. Indeed, we all owe you so many thanks for all your goodness to all our dear ones. Well, Dr. Ali and Dr. Chichele, you'll come with me, I'm sure, and I'll take you to the very loveliest spot in all the valleys of my beloved Esterel."

Harry glanced at Olwen inquiringly. "Would you mind my going, Olwen?" he asked in a hesitating tone. "I'm not in the least tired myself. In fact, I'd like to stretch my legs a bit among the mountain tops after three days' continuous railway travelling."

Poor Olwen's heart was divided within her by conflicting emotions. She couldn't bear to be left at home alone with Ivan—it would be so awkward to be boxed up in the garden for a whole day with a rejected admirer—and she couldn't bear that Harry should go away from her with this terrible, clever, overpowering novelist woman. Yet, on the other hand, she was really tired, and she didn't at all relish the idea of climbing a couple of thousand feet or so among the steep paths of the

craggy Esterel. "I think I could go, too, Harry," she answered at last, with evident hesitation. "I'm not so *very* tired. We could take a cab down to the station, couldn't we; and it's not very much of a climb, is it, when we get to the place we're going to start from?"

Mohammad Ali and Ivan Royle both warmly protested against her fatiguing herself, and Seeta Mayne, too, put in her word against her taking any unnecessary trouble. But Seeta Mayne's protest only made Olwen now the more determined to go; and Harry's remonstrances being evidently lukewarm, she started at last, much against her will, for this horrid excursion among the hateful Esterels.

They took their lunch with them, and set out on their tramp from Agay Station, among pine-shadowed paths that led rapidly by a steep mount up to the ruddy pinnacles of solid red porphyry. Seeta Mayne was a practised mountaineer; she climbed the rocks with grace and ease, accepting Harry's hand over the most difficult places rather as a tribute to her inherent womanhood, Olwen fancied to herself, than from any actual or genuine need for practical assistance. Olwen, on the other hand, felt herself decidedly demoralized and out of training after her year spent in the forced and feverish gaieties of London. She fell behind greatly on the line of march, straggling perpetually, though Ivan and Ali did their best to assist her and to lighten her labour over the steepest bits of the rugged ascent.

After many windings in the zigzag path, up, and up, and ever up, with Harry and Seeta continually in front of them, they came in sight at last of a single natural obelisk of naked rock, rising high like a pillar of rude workmanship above a tor or summit of the weather-worn porphyry. On its very top, for it was wide and massive, Seeta Mayne perched, seated in triumph like a queen upon her throne, waving them forward and encouraging them to come on with her delicately embroidered cambric handkerchief. Olwen toiled on and up wearily. At length, half faint with climbing, she reached the foot of the big rock itself, and with Ivan's help scaled its crannied side, till they all sat down panting together on the broad platform, with the whole expanse of the surrounding panorama stretched in endless perspective before their delighted eyes.

"It's a beautiful view, certainly," Olwen ventured to murmur as she gazed around. "But, do you know, Miss Mayne, I always like better to look at the hills from below than from above. I love the gracious smiling woods and valleys, I think, far more than these vast illimitable prospects."

"I don't at all agree with you," Seeta Mayne responded, turning sharply upon her, and looking poor Olwen through and through with those great gray eyes of hers. "For my part, I love the breezy mountain tops. I love the broad view one gets from the imperial heights. I love the expanse, the width, the glory, the freedom. It delights me to stand, like Moses on Pisgah, or Michael in some great mediæval cathedral window, on the exact summit of some jagged peak—some needle of rock that pierces the very vault of heaven with its sharp pinnacle—and look down upon all the dreamy world below, valleys and

plains and cities of men"—and she waved her white hand vaguely around her towards Cannes and Nice and the Italian seaboard—"stretched like a map far beneath my feet, for me to behold and learn and comment upon."

"I am on your side, Miss Mayne," Harry murmured quietly, drinking in the view with all his eyes as he spoke. "I love the vast, the sublime, the illimitable, the infinite. A valley always seems to choke and stifle me. On the free hill-tops I breathe the full fresh air of heaven, and view the world like a road before me to be travelled in the future."

For ten minutes they sat and looked, talking only in little sudden bursts of exclamation and delight about that white village on the green hill-top, or that long grey road winding in a zigzag through the rocky pass over yonder. Then Seeta roused herself afresh with a hasty start. "Well, she said, looking round her, "shall we go on now, if you please, Mrs. Chichele?"

"Go on!" Olwen cried, a little distressfully. "Go on where? Is there somewhere else to go to? I thought, do you know, we were there already."

"There!" Seeta echoed. "Where? At our journey's end, do you mean? Oh, dear no, most decidedly not. The spot where Ivan made that lovely sketch of his is quite half an hour further on than this, away up among the other mountains."

"Oh, I'm awfully sorry," Olwen replied with a flushing face, "but I'm really afraid I can't go on another step for all the views in Europe. It's so long since I've done any mountain climbing, and I'm quite tired already now. But don't let me keep any of the rest of you back, I beg of you. I can stop here alone till you all return. I should be so sorry to think I interfered with any of your plans in any way."

"No, no," Seeta Mayne answered, not at all unkindly, for she saw Olwen was fairly done up. "You *do* look tired, really, Mrs. Chichele. I'm afraid it's all my own fault too, for having inveigled you into coming against your will; though you know I advised you at first to stop at home in charge of Ivan, didn't I? Well, now, you mustn't dream of coming a step further. Ivan has seen the place already, of course, and knows every stick and stone of it by heart, so he'll stop behind here gladly and take care of you. Dr. Ali and your husband will come on with me, and be back here again to you by about lunch time."

"Oh, please don't," Olwen cried in alarm. To be left for an hour alone here on the mountain tops with Ivan Royle, would be almost worse than being left at the hotel with him. What on earth could they two find to talk about?

"Oh no," she went on, after a short pause. "Can't you all, please, go off together? I don't a bit mind being left alone. I really don't. I should rather prefer it. It's so beautiful here, and I should like to look at it for ever and ever."

"Impossible!" Ivan answered with profound conviction. "In this lonely place! And all by yourself, too! Why, there are wild

bears in the woods, and foxes by the dozen, and I don't even know that there mayn't be wolves, too! Better stop here, Seeta, all the party, and have lunch together on this jolly platform. The Nook can wait for a more convenient season."

Seeta planted her small and neatly-shod foot conspicuously and firmly on the rock in front of her. "When I puts my foot down, Ivan," she quoted quietly, with her benignant smile, "I puts it down, an' there's an end on 't. I hate this instability and infirmity of purpose. I was not born of the tribe of Reuben, unstable as water, who shall not excel. We started out to go to the Nook, and to the Nook I mean to go, unless the finger of fate prevents me. Mrs. Chichele breaks down by the way. We leave her here under efficient protection. We go on ourselves to our original objective. Nothing can be simpler. Let's share the lunch, in case we don't return in time to have any. Mrs. Chichele and you can stop behind and have a nice little talk together. The two doctors and I will continue to carry out our original programme."

Olwen looked up with a face of distress. Mahommed Ali interposed to save her. Of two evils, he chose the least. If he could have split himself up into two people, Mohammad should have gone on with Harry and Miss Mayne, while Ali waited behind with Ivan Royle and Olwen. But, failing this convenient dual personality, at present confined to esoteric Buddhists and members of the Physical Research Society, Mohammad Ali judged it best in his entire capacity to save Olwen from the awkward necessity of a *tete-à-tete* with Ivan. "I will stop, too," he said in his firm, quiet, conclusive manner. "Miss Mayne is an amply sufficient guide by herself, Harry. She knows every inch and corner and twist and turning of these intricate mountains. Mrs. Chichele, you and Royle and I will stop and lunch by ourselves here on the platform."

The plan was charming. Nothing could have suited Seeta Mayne better. She preferred the freedom of an untrammelled conversation with Harry Chichele to the restraints of Mrs. Grundy as embodied in the third person of Mohammad Ali. "Very well," she said, taking a few sandwiches and a flask from the basket. "That'll do as well as anything else. Come along, Dr. Chichele. We'll start at once. Let us leave these others to their lower levels. They prefer to remain. You and I will tread the mountain heights together."

You and I will tread the mountain heights together! These ominous words fixed themselves deeply into Olwen's tortured heart and memory. She scented dimly in her own vague way the danger for the future that the words enclosed for her. They were indeed prophetic. For her, the lower levels of thought and sense; for those two, the mountain heights of romance together!

Half way down the rock, Seeta Mayne turned and called out in her clear queenly voice to Ivan, "Look out for us at the Nook. I'll flash the mirror at you."

"What does she mean?" Olwen asked in surprise.

"Oh," Ivan answered, with a quiet smile, "it's only one of Seeta's

dodges. She telegraphs, you know, by the Morse code, with a little pocket mirror she always carries. She'll let us know by a series of flashes when she and your husband finally get there. Seeta's all made up of dodges. She does nothing like ordinary people."

CHAPTER XX.

THEY sat long on the rocky platform, talking for the most part of the view and the surroundings, while Olwen with her field glass followed her husband and Seeta Mayne anxiously from afar, as they threaded their way along the mountain paths, towards the point where Ivan had recently sketched his much talked of picture. At times, the two wayfarers disappeared altogether beneath the over-arching pine trees or behind the projecting spurs of the nearer mountains; at times, they stood forth again upon some rocky ledge, or showed themselves for a moment in strong relief against the cold grey background of the northern sky-line. But whenever they were visible one thing was clear; they were always talking away together with the same evident interest, animation, and vividness as ever. Olwen could easily make out with the glass the very movements of Seeta Mayne's impetuous hand, and the rapid gesticulation of her arms and her alpenstock. They were enjoying their talk immensely, no doubt; two such clever talkers are always sure to appreciate one another, and to get on swimmingly in conversation together.

By-and-by, Mohammad Ali set out the lunch, and they ate their sandwiches and drank their claret on their rocky couch, laughing and talking more merrily now beneath the open sky, and with that grand panorama of sea and mountain stretched ever before them in glorious perspective.

After lunch, a beautiful bunch of crimson anemones hanging out from a cleft of rock on the slope opposite attracted for a moment Olwen's eye, and she cried to Ivan in a careless way, "How pretty they are! I should like to have them."

At the word, the two young men darted off with one accord to fetch the flowers. They ran lightly down the slope of the valley and up the opposite bank, in evident emulation, eager each to secure the prize before the other could reach it. Mohammad Ali was the first to pick them; he was a lighter and nimbler man than Ivan. Olwen was pleased; she preferred the Indian should get them rather than the Englishman.

On the way back, at the bottom of the slope, Ali paused for a second and looked hard at Ivan. "This is a bad business, Royle," he said, waving his hand towards Olwen, with profound distress in every line of his countenance.

"What business?" Ivan asked, only half understanding him, for his

perceptions were far less quick and instantaneous than his oriental companion's.

"Why, this business between Chichele and Miss Mayne," the Indian answered slowly. "I see danger signals looming ahead. A red light on the starboard bow. And what's worse, Mrs. Chichele herself sees them too. Sees them, and is already very much alarmed at them."

Ivan Royle stopped and glanced at him astonished. "Seeta Mayne's the haughtiest woman on earth," he said shortly. "She moves on a very high plane. No man that lives dare ever speak one single word or syllable amiss to her. I don't think Ol——, Mrs. Chichele, I mean—need trouble herself about that matter. Seeta's as cold as ice and as proud as Lucifer."

"So I see," the Indian answered, with the calm confidence of a *priori* conviction. "I'm not in the least afraid on that score. The plane on which she moves is indeed an ideal one. I only tremble for her influence on Harry."

Ivan answered never a word. He only pondered by himself mutely. They walked back in silence to the isolated rock where Olwen sat, and Mohammad Ali handed her the anemones with his stately bow of oriental courtesy. Olwen received them with a sweet smile of cordial recognition—a smile that Ivan Royle fairly envied him. "I think Miss Mayne is flashing to us," she said as she took them; "at least, I see the light of a mirror coming and going very often, Mr. Royle."

"So she is," Ivan cried, shading his eyes with his hand, and gazing northward. "I can see it distinctly. And what's more, she's half-way through her message now. Two dots and a dash; that's *l*, you know. Then comes *e*, *a*, *n*, *d*, *i*, *a*, *r*, *e*, *g*, *o*, *i*, *n*, *g*," and he spelt out the message letter by letter, writing it down in pencil as he went, on the back of an envelope.

"Here's what I make it," he said at last, handing the envelope with its inscription across to Olwen. "'——le and I are going down direct to Agay Station. Later than we thought. No time to return for you to the summit.' The first words are missing; but, of course, she means 'Dr. Chichele.' They won't come back for us, that's plain; and we must start soon, too, if we want to catch the 3.40 home again."

He gave his hand, as he spoke with a smile, to Olwen, who took it at once with the tips of her fingers, all too lightly, and tried to descend with an easy jump or two from the summit of the pinnacle. But the crannies in which she had to put her little feet were damp and treacherous with moss and mould. She missed her foothold in the first she tried, and stumbling at the mishap, fell slightly, with only the tip of Ivan's hand to keep her from falling over bodily. In a second, Mohammad Ali had leaped from the top on to the ground below—a dangerous jump for one less lithe than he—and clambering up the side in breathless haste, he gave Olwen the chance of supporting herself with her hand upon his sturdy shoulder. Olwen steadied herself thus with great difficulty, and allowed the Indian to help her in his arms down to the bottom. As soon as she felt herself on firm ground again, she sat down on the bare rock with every mark of pain in her twitching

face. "I've hurt my ankle," she said, holding her foot out straight in a rigid attitude. "I'm almost afraid I must have sprained it. It aches dreadfully. What am I to do, so far from home, and with Harry away, too, up there among the mountains?"

Mohammad Ali, doctor as he was, did not dare to presume upon his professional character even to examine that small dainty foot of hers. "Let us wait awhile," he said, bending over her eagerly, "and see if it gets better soon of itself. It may be only a passing wrench. A few minutes' rest often sets an injury of that sort all right again."

But in this particular case a few minutes' rest did nothing of the sort, nor at all like it. On the contrary, when Olwen tried to move it again some moments later, she gave a sudden little cry of sharp pain, and screwed up her face once more in evident agony.

"Can you move it, so?" Mohammad Ali asked in much anxiety, twisting his own foot with his hand a little freely in the socket.

Olwen tried with her own fingers. "Oh no," she answered, almost crying with pain; "it hurts me horribly. It's awfully bad. There seems to be something there that's strained or contracted."

Mohammad Ali looked hard at Ivan. "Royle," he said, "this is a serious injury. The joint's sprained, there can be no doubt of that. Stop you here with Mrs. Chichele, please. I'll go down to Agay and borrow an invalid chair to carry her down in. On no account must she walk upon it in her present condition."

"Hadn't I better go?" Ivan asked, dubiously. "I know the people, and can get anything I want from them."

"No," Mohammad Ali answered, with a firm decision in his clear voice, which made Ivan feel at once he had some perfectly good and sufficient reason for what he said. "My French will carry me through very well for all I want, thank you. It will be better so. Stop here with Mrs. Chichele till I come again." And before Ivan or Olwen could say anything further or change his plan, the Indian was off, with his light and rapid oriental step, bounding like a chamois down the slopes of the mountain.

Ivan vaguely recognized in his own mind that Ali was right in his course of action. If Olwen must stop alone for an hour with any man on the lonely mountain tops, it was best she should stop not with the Indian, but with her own fellow-countryman. Being a black man cuts both ways. There are times and seasons when it counts for a perfect automatic protection from Mrs. Grundy, and there are times when it serves to call forth the severest and profoundest comments of that dreadful potentate of Seeta Mayne's special detestation. Mohammad Ali had judged aright at once by instinct. Ivan Royle, following him at a distance by the slower and dimmer light of reason instead, concluded at last on the whole that he had acted wisely.

But what an hour of torture and suspense that wise action of his entailed upon both of them in their awkward shyness! They were both self-conscious, and both endeavoured to hide their self-consciousness, which of all gratuitous forms of deception known to humanity is the most absolutely transparent and the most utterly futile. Ivan

dared not even steal a glance sideways at poor blushing Olwen ; he dared not look her straight in the face, and he dared not let her see that he dared not. Now and again their eyes met timidly on neutral ground, as it were, for a second ; and then they both let them drop again with a sudden awkwardness, and pretended not to notice that they had either of them observed it. A dozen times one or other exclaimed, in a wearied-out, nervous, half-peevish way, "I wonder when they'll bring that chair up !"

At last, after they had fairly exhausted the resources of commonplace, and were racking their brains for anything else of absolute inanity and harmless platitude, to fill up the gaps in their languishing conversation, they saw Mohammad Ali hurrying up the slope, with a couple of porters, bearing between them an invalid chair, borrowed in haste from the occupants of a villa down below at Agay.

At the sight Ivan breathed again freely for the first time since Ali left him. They put Olwen into the chair, and Ali and Ivan assisted the porters in carrying her down, to ensure against a fall as well as against any unnecessary jerking or shaking of the injured limb.

At the station, of course, they were too late for the train they had originally intended to catch, and they saw no sign of Harry and Seeta. A monsieur and a grand lady had gone off by the preceding train, the station-master told them ; the monsieur had just come up at the last moment to take his tickets, and had jumped into a carriage on the point of departure, inquiring whether two other gentleman and an English lady had already arrived there. So Ali and Ivan set down Olwen in the bare little waiting-room at the tiny *gare*, still seated in her chair, and patiently attended the 5.20 train.

Meanwhile, Harry and Seeta, in blissful ignorance of all that was happening, had "trod the mountain heights together," much to their own mutual and internal satisfaction. They had walked along the path to the Nook, sometimes pausing to pick a flower or admire the view, sometimes strolling idly by the ledges of the rock, sometimes buried in the profound shade of the pine trees, but always deep in conversation with one another on topics that seemed to come and go with all the varied and lightening-like rapidity of a clever woman's many-sided mind.

So they strolled on, oblivious of the time, and full only of themselves and of one another. At the Nook itself, a beautiful little gorge, deep among the rocks and woods, and thick with flowers, Harry drew back suddenly with a start of recognition. "Ivan Royle is not the only artist who has painted this bit," he said quickly, with a glance at her face and a deep-drawn breath of evident admiration. "I recognize it at once. I have seen it before, drawn by a far more delicate and poetical brush than even Royle himself can wield. I should have known it anywhere, no matter how or when I came upon it."

"Indeed," Seeta cried, flushing up with pleasure, yet half in doubt still as to whether he really meant it. "Where have you seen it ? At the Academy, perhaps, or in the Paris Salon ?"

"No," Harry answered, with a shake of his head and a responsive

smile. "In a far more gracious gallery than either. In 'The Price of Wisdom,' I see at a glance this is the very spot where your hero reveals the secret of his heart to Gladys Trevelyan."

"It is," Seeta replied, with that pleased thrill that an author always feels at the slightest touch of personal recognition. "I'm glad you know the place again. I took great pains when I drew that scene with my little background—only a touch or two, yet chosen, I thought, with effective selection. A stroke, well chosen, I often think, may put a whole view before the reader's mind."

"Clearly," Harry answered; "otherwise, how could I recognize it? Why, here are the very lichens on the joints of the rocks, and here's the great red ice-worn boulder that Gladys sat upon with her poor little heart throbbing and fluttering, while Owen told her the story of his hopeless passion. It's a beautiful scene—a wonderful scene. I don't know that any scene in all fiction has ever stirred me or thrilled me more profoundly."

"Than this view?" Seeta suggested, with intentional misunderstanding.

"Miss Mayne! How can you? You must take me for a stone. And you, too, who yourself created it! If any one else had said such a thing as that to me, I would have called him an insensible block of marble! No, not this view, but that delicious scene in 'The Price of Wisdom,' where Owen breaks his love so gently to dear little Gladys. When I came to those terrible, crushing words, 'Gladys, Gladys, I cannot marry you! I'm married already!' the tears rose hot and irrepressible in my eyes, and I could have cried for hours for the hopeless misery of those two poor unhappy young lovers."

Seeta gazed at him long and straight. Her delicate nostrils quivered and dilated. Her eyes flashed fire, and then fell again for a moment. His obvious appreciation made her heart flutter. At last she raised her eyelids once more, and looked him full in the face for a second. "Let us have our lunch, Dr. Chichele," she said outright, with cold matter-of-fact calmness, in a clear, unconcerned straightforward fashion.

Nothing she could have said would have shown him more fully how much she was affected by his praise of her story. It was a transparent subterfuge—she meant it as such. He had touched her on a very tender spot. She wished him to see it. She did not dare to continue the conversation.

They both started and looked away in haste. Seeta threw herself down gracefully on the grass beside the big red boulder. Harry pulled from his pocket his wicker-covered flask, and drawing off the silver cup at the bottom, filled it with claret and handed it to Seeta. She took it graciously, with a responsive nod, and holding a sandwich daintily between her delicate finger and thumb—even a sandwich became instinct with poetry in Seeta Mayne's beautiful hands—she drained off the claret at a single long draught, with an action like that of some sculptured nymph or picturesque bacchante. Then, smiling at Harry her most charming smile, she stretched out her hand for the flask her-

self and poured him out a cupful of the sparkling wine in return, with the very manner of a marble Hebe. In passing it over, she handed it to him naturally with the other side of the cup turned towards him from that out of which she had herself drunk ; but it did not escape her quick eye that Harry turned the vessel carefully round, so as to let his own lips touch where hers had touched before him. The little act of homage naturally pleased her. Harmless homage to a beautiful woman. A beautiful woman expects as much, and accepts it as her due, who ever pays it to her.

After a while, Harry drew his watch carelessly from his pocket.

"By Jove," he cried, "how the time's gone ! It flies, indeed, in such converse. We shall miss the train, I'm afraid. It's past two, I declare, already."

"There's another way down," Seeta answered lightly, not without a certain smile of inward contentment. "I'll flash to Ivan to meet us at the station. It'll give us longer for our talk together ; and, after all, for conversation, two is really the ideal number."

She drew the little mirror from her reticule as she spoke, and flashed her message with rapid precision across to the pinnacle.

Presently, as they sat there still on the grass, Harry began again about "The Price of Wisdom" and her other books. But Seeta, for her part, rather avoided the subject than otherwise. "Don't let's talk about *my* work," she said at last, proudly, with a half-contemptuous toss of her queenly head, and a haughty shrug of her imperial shoulders, "Let's talk about *yours*, please, Dr. Chichele. Don't pay me the bad compliment of taking me for a mere novelist—of supposing I think my own poor small line of authorship can compare for a moment in worth and importance with the deep things of thought or philosophy. I try to attain what perfection I can, to be sure, in my own petty and shallow department of art ; but I know well enough that when all's said and done, art itself is simply nowhere by the side of science, the profound, the immeasurable."

"I'm not so sure of that," Harry answered, flattered, and therefore disposed to be generously self-depreciative. "Imagination's a marvellous faculty in its own way. The ability to fill an ideal world with high creations of one's own formative and constructive fancy appears to me, I confess, one of the greatest and deepest endowments of genius. For example, when I read 'Penora' and 'The Price of Wisdom,' for my own part, I stand aghast and astonished and humbled before it."

"No, no," Seeta cried, waving her hand in contradiction, and warming up as she spoke into one of her wild rhapsodical humours. "You're wrong, Dr. Chichele. Imagination's all very well in its way, no doubt, but the power to discover and to recognize the great underlying truths of nature is an immeasurably higher and nobler faculty. Man stands face to face in the last resort with an infinite universe, a system of suns, the outcome of a vast and illimitable energy. What is man, I wonder, among the atoms and the systems ? What is woman, I wonder, among the eternities and the infinities ? A speck, a dot, a nothing, an iota. The philosopher looks forth with keen glance across the immeasurable

abysses of time and space, and sees the formless waste of chaos slowly setting into suns and stars and rings and planets. He sees life unfolding by tentative steps on the cooling surface of some petty world. He sees and knows in its own essence the very heart and core of things mundane and spiritual, as physis and metaphysis combine to show it to him. And then, at the very moment when my vision aches with the vastness of the space and the length of the time he unfolds before me—you come, you, a man of science yourself—to tell me, with your pleasant condescending smile, that the power of inventing a pretty little story about how a nice little man falls in love with a nice little girl, and after many vicissitudes finally marries or does not marry her (which is at bottom, of course, the alternative framework of all possible or actual romances), outweighs in value these wonderful faculties of yours for beholding and conceiving the inmost facts and realities of nature! If you expect me to believe you, you must take me for a proud, conceited fool. No, no, I'll hear no more about it, from you or from any man! A friend once told me that George Eliot was in his eyes a much greater genius than Herbert Spencer; and I conceived at once a very low opinion of my friend's intelligence. Despise me, if you like, as a woman, a trifler, a mere novelist; but don't, at least, suppose I have no soul superior to novel-writing. Do me the honour to think me at any rate appreciative of better things. I know what is great whenever I find it; I know what is great, and I worship it accordingly." And she looked up at him from the grass where she lay, with the worship pouring forth most intoxicatingly from those great grey eyes of hers, and that exalted languishing far-away expression on her face which sometimes comes to beautiful women in their supremest moments.

If Olwen could only have seen them just then as she sat far below with Ivan by the foot of the rock, it would not have been her ankle alone that ached and pained her. Her heart would have felt a sudden wrench. Those two were, indeed, treading the mountain heights together.

CHAPTER XXI.

HARRY CHICHELE was in his element. Seeta suited him. The incense of that beautiful woman's subtle flattery, so profound, so intense, so impersonal, so eloquently expressed, mounted up like the fumes of wine to his heated brain, and fairly turned his head with its inebriating influence. He could have sat there for ever and listened to Seeta's views upon himself and the universe—if he had not had to go back at 3.40, to Cannock and to Olwen.

"Come," he exclaimed at last, rising slowly from his moss-grown seat by the boulder, with his watch cradled in the hollow of his hand. "We must be moving now. I've been counting the minutes. If we don't hurry we shall miss them all down yonder at Agay."

Seeta roused herself at the word from the infinities and eternities ; shook off the Cosmos with a graceful movement of her loose skirts ; brought back her eyes from the abysses of air ; and returned with a start to solid earth on the flanks of the Esterel. She had been pervading space ; she must now return to Cannes and dinner.

At the railway at Agay they failed to find Olwen and her two companions ; but arriving at the very last moment themselves, they jumped in hastily and went home together by the 3.40 train, fully expecting to meet their party from another carriage at the Cannes Station. No Olwen yet appearing, however, they walked up to the hotel, still *tete-a-tete*, without much misgiving, for Harry did not suspect any harm had come to his wife with such efficient guides as Ali and Ivan.

As they neared the hotel he turned to Seeta and observed with a sigh, " This has been a very delightful outing. I'm sorry it's over. What a glorious introduction a day in the country is together ! To think that you and I only met yesterday, and yet to-day we're old friends already."

" True," Seeta answered. " But chance alone is only half the secret. We needed no introduction to one another. You knew me before in my books ; I knew you before in your scientific discoveries. That's the best of the orbit in which such people as you and I revolve. The world at large, when it meets its peers, has slowly to pick up by vague side hints, a bit at a time, something about their tastes, their ideas, their habits, their opinions. You and I, when we first cross one another's path, meet with our acquaintance already more than half formed ; we know one another in part by anticipation. A thousand traits of character and thought are familiar to start with ; a thousand modes of expression strike upon one's ears with the pleasing and delightful ring of long-standing acquaintanceship."

" But our walk, too, has brought us very much nearer together," Harry went on reflectively. " I feel now as if I had known you always. You seem like somebody I've met for years past."

" No doubt," Seeta replied. " It is the same with me. I have indeed gained a friend. That's a rare gain in life, Dr. Chichele. I have made but few. You are one of them. I knew beforehand you would be from what I had read of you."

" And yet," Harry mused, " our lines lie so very far apart."

" That's nothing," Seeta answered, lifting her eyes once more. " We are akin for all that. Thought always sympathizes with thought."

She spoke sincerely, and flooded him, as she loved to do, with the glory of her great grey eyes. A woman novelist specially values the esteem of those whom she regards as men of scientific and philosophical eminence. She doesn't wish to be considered a mere story-teller. She wants the applause of real thinkers. The evident admiration of Dr. Chichele, the professor of ætiology, and great authority on microbes and germs and epidemic diseases, flattered Seeta Mayne to the top of her bent every bit as much as the evident admiration of Seeta Mayne, the beautiful woman and distinguished novelist, flattered and delighted Harry Chichele. Each was particularly pleased with the other's homage ;

to each it was the exact form of appreciation which most closely touched his or her own profoundest vein of personal vanity.

At the hotel door, a waiter met them with a telegram in his hand. "For monsieur," he said. Harry opened it and glanced through it hastily. It gave him a sudden shock of surprise. "Mrs. Chichele has sprained her ankle badly. Return next train. Meet us. Ali."

In a moment he had forgotten all about Seeta, and her ideas and experiences, and was hurrying back at full speed to the railway station to see if he could get another train back to Agay before the one by which Olwen was to arrive had yet started. There was none, however, and he was forced to possess his soul in what patience he might, lounging about in the hall of the station meanwhile, till Olwen's train should reach Cannes.

He reproached himself very bitterly now for his remissness in not having waited on the summit with Olwen. How unkind she would think him ever to have left her; how much more unkind not to have returned to her after the accident. If only he had stopped for her at Agay Station even. But there was no help for it now. What was done was done. A little cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, had risen up between himself and Olwen.

When the train arrived he helped her tenderly home to the hotel; he bandaged and bathed the sprained limb with infinite care and gentleness himself; he lavished upon her every attention that either his medical skill or his personal affection could possibly suggest to him; but all the time he felt dimly conscious in the back-ground of his mind of the cloud that had risen up so subtly between them. Neither said a word about it. Olwen certainly never dreamt of reproaching him, she was too deeply hurt in her own soul to think of reproaches. She only murmured many times over, "I did so wish you'd been with me, Harry." And Harry without attempting to apologize or excuse himself, answered in the same simple direct manner, "I wish I had been, darling; I do most earnestly wish I had been."

The Riviera is always beautiful, always bright, always delightful, always sunshiny; but for the remainder of Olwen Chichele's stay at Cannes it was clouded over in her eyes by that little cloud, no bigger at first than a man's hand, but gradually growing and spreading and thickening, till at last it covered with its skirts her whole private mental horizon, and darkened for her all that lovely prospect, from the rocks of St. Tropez to the palm groves of Bordighera. To begin with, her sprain confined her for the most part to the hotel; and although Harry had her moved to a room on the ground floor, which opened out by French windows on to the garden terrace where she could look across to the sea and the islands, still it was weary lying there on the sofa all day and gazing out even on that exquisite prospect of trees and water. Harry wheeled the sofa on to the terrace at times, and Ivan and Ali hovered about, ever eager and watchful to do her bidding; but at the very moment when the sun was brightest, and the birds were singing their blithest among the laden oleanders, Seeta Mayne would stroll casually across the gardens towards them, book in hand and finger

in page, and in a trice the cloud would rise up as if by magic once more, and cover the heavens from side to side with its thick pall of outer darkness. It was very wrong of her, Olwen said to herself; and yet, with a woman's instinct, she could not help it. She scented danger afar off on the breezes long before either Seeta or Harry himself had the faintest suspicion of its possible presence.

Then again, Harry could not, of course, be always by her side. He was very good to her, very constant, very gentle, very attentive: but she couldn't bear to spoil his hard-earned holiday for him, and she insisted at times that he should certainly leave her and go for walks with the other men among the hills and mountains. On such occasions Seeta sometimes stopped at home and kept her company; but sometimes, on the other hand, she went with Harry and her cousin—or, rather, they all four started together, to find themselves paired off by natural selection into couples before long, the first couple being always Harry and Seeta, while the second was Ivan and Mohammad Ali. Olwen hardly knew which of the two alternatives she disliked the most; for, when Seeta Mayne stopped at home, she often talked to poor bewildered Olwen wholly above her head, vague rhapsodies about life and love, or else profound philosophical discussions: and when she went out, why, then, of course, she went out with Harry. And the bitterest part of it all was that even Olwen herself could not help admiring, nay, even in some strange under-current of feeling positively liking and almost loving Seeta Mayne. A very little, to say the truth, would have made Olwen actually worship her prospective rival. Seeta was so beautiful, she was so graceful, she was so clever, she was so interesting, and at times, when Olwen was in pain or weary, she was so really and truly kind and sympathetic. From her lofty pedestal, indeed, she condescended in turn to like and admire and love Olwen. A dear, pretty, simple, little thing, and so thoroughly womanly, too, in every thought and act and feeling! But so utterly unsuited, when one looked at it that way, to a man of Dr. Chichele's mental calibre!

As for Harry, he enjoyed to the full his rambles on the mountain slopes with Seeta. She knew by sight every rare flower on the Riviera, and the exact spots where they all grew; and the desire to show them to Harry and Ivan gave an excuse for more than one long excursion among the hills that stretched back from the winter city.

How they rambled and talked among those lovely hills; now they gazed entranced over sea and mountain; how they gathered wild flowers among the spurs of the Esterel; how they discussed the government of earth and heaven. And what occupations can be more dangerous to the slippery and unstable human heart than rambling in the hills, looking at the mountains, talking philosophy, and gathering wild flowers with a beautiful woman? Scenery and poetry are very closely akin to love; the talk about one glides off imperceptibly into talk about the other, and lands you, where you know not, before you have even so much as dreamt of it.

Moreover, Seeta was both by trade and by nature introspective and analytic. She thought and talked much about the people with whom

she was conversing, and their inmost feelings and characteristics. Therefore she thought and talked much with Harry Chichele about their two selves. To talk about your two selves is always fascinating, and always interesting; it allows so much scope for subtle flattery and delicate egotism; but it is also always perilous and always complicating; it leads you for ever on thin ice, over which to glide lightly and gracefully, is in itself a delicious exercise of supreme skill. Harry and Seeta enjoyed that dangerous amusement together to the full; they saturated themselves with mutual self-analysis; they frankly discussed their own two personalities; they laid themselves bare with perfect freedom before one another's scrutinizing and admiring gaze. They intoxicated themselves with the joy of dissecting their own inmost and profoundest nature.

It is always delightful to talk about one's self to a sympathetic listener, especially when that listener is a beautiful woman.

"I've enjoyed these walks immensely, Dr. Chichele," Seeta said one day with a quiet sigh, as Harry's holiday was drawing at last to its close. "They have been for me a new sensation. I live so much out of the world of thought. I mix for the most part only with the commonplace. To meet with minds fresh from the centre of things—cells in the very growing-point of science, as it were—has given me a delightful and novel interest in life, and the friendship we have formed in these few weeks at Cannes will last us out in future, I hope, for a whole lifetime."

Harry Chichele looked down at her with profound admiration. "I can see now," he said, "who wrote 'The Price of Wisdom,' and how she gained the knowledge to write it. What a wonderful insight into our minds you possess. You read human hearts like an open book, Miss Mayne."

Seeta smiled again. "Every man to his trade," she answered lightly. "It is no sin, as Falstaff says, to labour in one's vocation. My vocation is to probe and search out the hidden nooks and crannies of the heart of man. I paint the human soul as Ivan Royle paints a landscape—in minute detail, as the result of patient care and study."

"And you've studied mine now, I suppose, and done with it for ever," Harry cried, half regretfully. "You've taken stock of your model and got to the very bottom of its small nature. You'll throw me away next like a sucked orange."

"That would argue very bad art indeed," Seeta answered with a grave face. "To the true artist, no study on earth is ever quite complete or final. Have you or your fellows yet finished knowing all about the mere bodily structure and functions of man—his earthly mechanism—his anatomy and physiology—his wheels, and cranks, and works, and mainsprings? Do you know, right through, his heart, and his lungs, and his brain, and his muscles? No, nor ever will either. And how infinitely more varied and diverse and unknowable are the tunes we can get out of a human soul—an organ of many pipes, with endless stops and variants and diapasons—the outcome of a million years of evolution." Her voice fell a moment to a lower key. "My study is

only just begun," she said softly. "We shall meet again, I hope. Elsewhere. Often."

"Thank you," Harry replied, with a deep thrill, and said no more. They walked along some minutes together in silence. Silence is the most eloquent of human voices. Nothing on earth can say so much. It speaks the heart in its most unutterable moods and symphonies.

During the last week of their stay at Cannes, Olwen was so far recovered that she could drive out in an open carriage, and Harry and Seeta generally drove out with her, Ivan and Ali walking in the same direction, and meeting them by appointment at their journey's end. Olwen really enjoyed these drives immensely, along the sweeping curve of coast to the roadstead at Golfe Jouan, or by the rocky dells, starred with purple and scarlet anemones, to the beautiful potteries at deep-throated Vallauris. It was so delightful to go out with Seeta. Seeta talked to her charmingly now. Olwen, too, was numbered among her victims. The first flush of the younger woman's terror at the great novelist's cleverness and superciliousness had begun to wear off, and Olwen almost ventured to chat and gossip naturally at last with her alarming acquaintance about the usual nothings of feminine conversation. Seeta was trying hard to win her heart, and when Seeta Mayne found it worth her while to take that easy trouble with anybody on earth, the somebody, as a rule, fell a willing prey to the graceful woman's gracious condescension. The famous novelist had come down off her pedestal, in fact—at least as far as Olwen was concerned—and was doing her best to be charming and agreeable. Seeta's best was good indeed; and Olwen felt herself flattered and pleased accordingly. They got on famously together now. Olwen was almost in love with Seeta.

Besides, next week it would all be over, and she would have Harry every bit to herself again at home in Hampstead.

That thought in itself nerved her up and delighted her. The cloud after all was but a passing shadow. Seeta had come and Seeta would go again; but she herself, Olwen, like the open blue sky, at the back of it all, remained for ever in Harry's heart as permanent background of married happiness.

So it is in every true man's heart. So it would be Olwen felt, in her own with Harry. So it must be, therefore, she argued, for her in Harry's.

They were driving along on their last whole day at Cannes by the beautiful water-side road among the great umbrella pines in the Frejus direction. It was a glorious day. The sunshine overhead was bright and unbroken; the sunshine within was growing clear and cloudless again.

"And so to-morrow we shall leave dear old Cannes behind for ever," Olwen said with a sigh, as she turned to Seeta. She really loved the place to-day, it was so bright and gay and calm and beautiful. "And you 'oo, Miss Mayne! We shall have to leave you. When shall we see you again, I wonder?"

"In April," Seeta answered, locking up at her suddenly. "In London. I shall be there with the tulips and the swallows. I mean henceforth to come to England every year for the summer."

Olwen glanced at her sideways, half in doubt, as she leaned back uneasily on the cushions of the carriage. "I thought," she cried, with a vague surmise of breakers ahead, "you never cared for London society."

"I did not," Seeta answered, with a stately inclination of her proud head; "that is to say, I did not, till recently. I've now found out new interests in London. It means to me more than it meant of old. I shall come to England frequently in future. England is nearer and dearer to me to-day than it ever was in all my life before."

"Why?" Olwen asked, with an uncomfortable glance.

"My dear little woman, how can you ask me why?" Seeta echoed good-humouredly. "While you are in London, how can my heart keep long away from it? Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. I have found new treasures in England, new friends who will always be very, very dear to me."

She smiled at Olwen so sweet and so genuine a smile of affection as she spoke that Olwen almost tried to conceal from herself the chagrin and disappointment with which she received this flattering avowal of eternal friendship.

CHAPTER XXII.

FEBRUARY, March, and half April passed pleasantly and easily enough in London with Olwen Chichele. Ivan Royle and Mohammad Ali were both in town, and both were, as always, her obedient servants, for ever ready to do her bidding gladly. Harry had forgotten all about Seeta Mayne—for the present at least—and was assiduous in taking his pretty little wife about everywhere and showing her everything. Olwen had become a recognized feature in scientific society by this time. Everybody liked the charming little woman whose head had not been turned by society's admiration, and who was such a capital foil in a drawing-room, you know, to all those stiff old professors, and philosophical theory-mongers, and cultivated Girton girls of the modern pattern.

Towards the end of April, however, as Harry and she were driving one day together in the park, they stopped the carriage for a while to get out and walk down the flowery sidepaths in Kensington Gardens, then in their first fresh flush of springtide glory. It was a sunny afternoon, and the shrubs and flowers were looking their best, as London shrubs and flowers always do in warm, bright, showery April weather. Spring was early that year. The lilacs were already just bursting into their trusses of bloom, and the laburnums were beginning to display the coming promise of their golden glory on the drooping branches.

Olwen's heart was away in Cornwall. She sat down on one of the retired benches in the broad sunlight, and watched the bickering sparrows among the border opposite, playing after their kind with the last mangled remains of the dog's-tooth violet bulbs beneath the shade of the laurestinus bushes.

Suddenly a musical voice burst upon her ear. It uttered aloud six lines of Browning's :—

“ Oh ! to be in England, now that April's there !
And whoever wakes in England sees, some morning, unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf
Round the elm tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough,
In England—now ! ”

How strangely complex is the heart of man—and woman ! Olwen looked up with a thrill of positive pleasure running through her wildly from head to foot to see Seeta Mayne standing once more, tall and graceful and beautiful as ever, there before them.

Seeta was dressed as enchantingly as she always was—in an artistic costume, with loose cape and hat to match, in some soft neutral-tinted oriental material that exactly suited her rare and delicate type of beauty. She took Olwen's two hands affectionately in hers, and, bending forward, kissed her thrice, continental fashion, once on each cheek, and once on her full rich red Cornish lips, with genuine warmth and tenderness of expression. Then she held out one hand frankly to Harry, with a delicious smile, and took her seat beside them, like a friend, on the bench. “ Only this morning,” she said quickly, anticipating the question that rose unspoken on both their lips. “ I know you're going to ask me, of course, when and how I arrived in London. I came straight through by the night express. Yesterday morning at Cannes, seeing the white dust swirling on the roads before an angry mistral, I said over those lines of Browning's to myself. I thought of the luscious green English hedgerows, with their tender verdure just pushing out in tiny rosettes from every bud upon the naked branches. I thought of the daffodils, and the lilacs, and the horse-chestnuts. I thought of the skylarks, and the cuckoos, and the swallows. And I thought of two dear hearts over here in London, whose pulse beats henceforth for ever and ever in unison with mine.” She took Olwen's hand in hers, caressing it gently as she spoke. “ And I said to myself, ‘ I, too, must go. I must look upon those two bright faces again. I must follow the swallows over sea to England. For it's well to be in England now that April's there.’ So I packed up my traps at once and came across ; and I took myself rooms down yonder in Kensington ; and this afternoon, tempted out by the sunshine, all weary as I was, I started off to walk in Kensington Gardens here, after writing you a note. dear Mrs. Chichele, to tell you where you might expect to find me ; and the very first thing, as I turn in at the big garden gate, who should I see but just the two dear faces on whose account I have ven-

tured once more to confront in her den my old enemy—the inexorable, the ineffable, the terrific Mrs. Grundy.”

Olwen smiled and nestled her hand tenderly in Seeta's. How on earth could she ever have been so unjust and so blind as to dream of distrusting her, that dear, kind, gracious, sisterly woman? She fondled Seeta's hand with her own, twice over, and Seeta returned the caress, caressingly. Olwen was very, very happy. She had fairly dreaded Seeta Mayne's return; and now that Seeta had actually come, why, she felt as though she had recovered her dearest sister.

“You must come back with us in the carriage to tea at Hampstead,” Olwen cried, delighted. “We can't do without you.” Seeta nodded a pleased assent. “And you mustn't think of stopping down in Kensington, either. You must take rooms quite, quite close to us: or, Harry, don't you think Miss Mayne might perhaps be persuaded to come and stay with us in our own place, dear?”

“Why ‘Miss Mayne’? Why not Seeta?” the beautiful woman asked, melodiously.

Olwen raised her eyes in delight. At that moment she could positively have died for the lovely creature. She felt so pleased and proud and flattered that that great, clever, queenly woman should ever dream of letting her call her Seeta. Six months before she would have thought it impossible.

They drove back to Hampstead together, where Seeta sat long and talked much to both of them, and not as she had often been wont to do in the past, to Harry only. She talked at her most lovable as well as at her best; and when Seeta chose she could be very lovable—no woman more so. For she had that true characteristic of genius, that she knew to the full every possible mood and tone of humanity; no single phase of feeling was wholly alien to her. Olwen sat and listened and loved her; and when she had gone, she sighed a quiet sigh of profound regret. “Dear Seeta!” she said, turning sadly to Harry, “how I do wish she would only have come here and stopped with us, as I wanted her.”

“I don't know that that would be quite a wise arrangement,” Harry answered, inspecting his boots with nervous attention, and keeping his eyes rigidly averted from Olwen's. “At the lodgings over yonder she'll be quite near enough, I dare say. We mustn't exactly fling ourselves at her head, you know, just because she happens to be a favourite of society and a successful novelist of the passing moment.”

“Oh, Harry, how can you? It isn't that. You know it isn't that. I couldn't bear her to hear you say so. She's such a dear, sweet, sympathetic old thing. Did you see the way she clung to my hand, and smoothed it, and fondled me exactly like a sister? I just love Seeta! I wish she could come and live with us for ever and ever.”

“You wouldn't like it in the end,” Harry answered wisely. “Two's harmony, three's a discord.”

Next morning, Seeta came up early, and Olwen went round with her to inspect the lodgings close by. The result of their joint investigation proving quite satisfactory, it was arranged that Seeta should move in

on the next Saturday, as soon as her week was up at the rooms in Kensington.

For two or three months from that time, all through the thick of the London season, the Chicheles saw much of Seeta Mayne. She was seldom a whole day without calling to visit them. Gradually, Olwen's first dislike wore away entirely, and Seeta grew to be very dear to her.

One evening towards the end of June they went for a walk on the heath together. Ivan Royle was included in the party, and he loitered a little way behind with Olwen. Seeta, who stepped with a prouder and a quicker tread, walked on in front with Harry Chichele. They were talking together of a new discovery Harry had just published. As they reached the ridge that looks across the heath to Highgate and Harrow, Seeta turned her head round and glanced behind her. "Olwen's not coming on very quick," she said musingly. "Dr. Chichele, you've made a great many discoveries, but I think your greatest was your discovery of that sweet little creature, Olwen."

Harry laughed uneasily. "She's a good little woman," he said with a half-depreciatory wave of his graceful white hand. "I'm certainly proud of her, all things considered. I found her, as you know, in a little out-of-the-way Cornish village. She was quite the 'gem of purest ray unseen' that only a very stray passer-by was ever at all likely to hit upon. I happened to be the lucky passer-by—that's all. And so I married her. But I often wonder how it is that some other women—beautiful, clever, profound, attractive; living in the world, admired and courted; women that to look upon is, if not to love, at least to worship; queens of society, meant to shine in courts and great gatherings; should sometimes never have married at all. Unless, indeed, one explains it by the very obvious answer that they have never found anybody anywhere worthy of them."

"Not *never*?" Seeta Mayne answered slowly, her hot breath coming and going irregularly, with somewhat heightened quickness. "Not *never*; but perhaps only once or twice, or once alone, once in a lifetime. The more a woman has in her, surely, the harder must it be for her ever to find the one suitable complement and counterpart of her being, to whom alone she could freely surrender, for ever and ever her whole individuality. And suppose—suppose when she has once found him she finds at the same time that that one sole possible partner of her heart and soul—the only man she could consent to accept, has linked himself already to—to some one other?"

She looked at him close with eyes full of meaning. She meant him to understand. She did not conceal it. They two, thus talking carefully in the abstract, under the shallow disguise of general forms, knew perfectly well in their own hearts they were simply talking about one another.

Harry paused a moment before he replied. "That must be a terrible misfortune," he said at last, looking hard and close at her.

"It is a tragedy!" Seeta Mayne answered passionately.

They walked on a minute or two longer in silence. Then Seeta was the first to speak again. "It is a tragedy," she repeated, with infinite

tenderness, "but one which has its counterbalancing compensations also. It is better to have met him, even in vain, than one sole complement of one's intellectual and physical being, than never, never to have met him at all. And, if one has once really met him, it is not all in vain either. Suppose two persons in the position we are imagining; then if they can't have love, is it not at least a great thing for them that they can fall back in the last resort upon anything so innocent and beautiful and consoling as friendship."

"Miss Mayne!" Harry cried, holding his breath hard, "you are too terrible. You say things more openly than I dare say them myself. Though I am a man, you frighten me, you frighten me!"

"Your wife calls me 'Seeta,'" the beautiful woman said calmly, turning towards him. "Why should not you and I—at least when alone—call one another Seeta and Harry also? And why need I frighten you? What need for fear? Surely, surely, there is nothing wrong, nothing dangerous in friendship?"

"But, Seeta," Harry answered, accepting at once with fervour the proffered liberty of calling her by her name, "if you knew how terribly you make me feel! I swear to you, till this very moment I never guessed how profoundly and earnestly I——"

"Stop!" Seeta cried, laying her hand imperiously upon his arm to check him. "Don't utter that word. Don't slip it out for one second by accident. Let it never so much as be mentioned between us. Do you remember what I said to you at Cannes, that first day? 'You and I will tread the mountain heights together?' Well, let us always move, Harry, in that same high and pure stratum of ethereal feeling. Let us tread the mountain heights of human thought and human sympathy hand in hand, with no base descent into those lower valleys where Circe and her troop call for us to come down and mingle with them coarsely on their swinish level. Let us tread them together in the bond of friendship; let me feel towards you as I feel towards Olwen; let us never speak of one another or to one another in other terms than those pure terms of the higher brotherhood. Harry, you are very, very, very dear to me. Olwen is very, very, very dear to me. Let that suffice you, as it suffices me. Let the other word never so much as be mentioned between us,"

Harry pushed back his hat off his hot forehead. "Seeta," he cried, "you are, indeed, a great woman. I wish I could think and feel as you do. What a grand, lofty, impersonal path you seem to tread through life! And what you say is true, too. One has, indeed, a single predestined complement of one's being. How wonderfully you interpret one's inmost feeling! How, without my speaking, you have read my nature through and through. It is wonderful, wonderful. Whereas poor dear good little Olwen ——"

"Hush!" Seeta cried, more imperiously than before, frowning upon him as who could crush him with her frown. "Not a word against that sweet little trustful angel! If ever you dare to say a syllable to me, Harry Chichele, that even seems for a moment to disparage that beloved friend of mine, I will never again in my life speak to you."

Remember that! Olwen's a darling, and I love her in my heart. You shall never venture to utter a slighting word about her in *my* hearing.

Behind, on the path across the heath, Olwen Chichele was at that very moment saying to Ivan Royle, "I wonder, Mr. Royle, why on earth your cousin has never married. She must, of course, have had many chances."

"Chances!" Ivan echoed. "Chances! I believe you. Why, Mrs. Chichele, she came down to Oxford once when I was an undergraduate, and the entire university, from the vice-chancellor to the junior freshman, was at her feet in the course of a fortnight."

"How is it, then?" Olwen asked curiously. "I suppose she must be either very proud or very particular."

"I think," Ivan answered, "she would only marry if she happened to hit upon the one exact ideal man to whom she felt she could surrender herself utterly with a perfect surrender. She waits and chooses. She isn't anxious to marry. Only her precise mental complement, she says, will ever suit her, and she means it when she says it."

"And you think," she said, "Seeta has never yet met the one man she could conceivably marry?"

Ivan hesitated for half a second. "Perhaps not," he answered evasively. "I can hardly say. How clear the hills come out over yonder! We seldom get a day like this in London."

"For an artist, Mr. Royle, your transition was singularly inartistic."

She said it bitterly, not smilingly; for Ivan's slight pause and his qualified answer, as well as the clumsy ineffective way in which he had tried to break the thread of the conversation, had suddenly let into her mind a fresh doubt—a terrible doubt, more definite than of old. Seeta was really in love with Harry!

She looked at them there upon the summit of the hill, etched out in dark against the western sky-line, and the thought came over her with intense conviction that Ivan was thinking that very moment what a romantic picture they made as they stood side by side, wrapped in eager converse one with the other, like a pair of lovers.

"You would like to paint them?" she said, coldly.

And Ivan, feeling concealment useless—what good to try concealing anything from a woman?—answered the honest truth with a bold face, "I should like to paint them."

"And all the world would say —," she said.

Ivan looked down at her, alarmed at her frankness. "Yes, all the world would doubtless say so," he answered slowly. "Their attitudes alone are quite too eloquent."

Olwen walked on some steps in silence. Then she began once more. "Seeta's a very clever and remarkable woman," she said, with a chilly accent.

Ivan nodded. "And Harry's a very clever and remarkable man," he added.

Olwen clasped her hands in agony. "Mr. Royle! Mr. Royle! Is

it really true? Is she—is she better fitted for him, better adapted to Harry, than I am?”

Ivan Royle looked at her again with profound pity in his tender brown eyes. For the time being something irresistible seemed to carry him away. The best of men have their moments of unrestrainable emotion. He lost his customary self-control; he allowed himself to blurt out the obvious truth too readily and irrevocably. “Mrs. Chichele,” he said, “we’ve all four of us made a grievous mistake. Harry is better fitted for Seeta; Seeta is better fitted for Harry; and you and I—you and I—you and I—are better fitted for one another.”

Olwen trembled violently all over. She felt a terrible tremulous sense of error and failure—something like what she had felt that day two years before in the garden at Polperran, only ten thousand times more vivid and definite. She was terrified at the impassable alley into which she had allowed Ivan so blindly to lead her. And Ivan, for his part, seeing one moment later the fatal import and irrevocable nature of the words he had spoken, stood before her, penitent and ashamed, not knowing what to say or where to look, but mutely with his eyes imploring her forgiveness. She could not be angry with him; it was all too true; but she shrank appalled and terrified herself from her own wickedness in even daring to perceive it.

“Mr. Royle,” she said at last, with fiery energy, “how dare you say so? You have no right at all to speak to me like that. I can’t stop with you. Take me on at once, please, to my husband.”

Without a word, Ivan led her on with downcast eyes to where Harry and Seeta stood waiting for them on the summit of the heath. His heart was very heavy within him. He knew he had sealed the doom of their friendship. He could never again speak to Olwen.

How slight a passing impulse may thus wreck the purpose of a life in this conventional glozing modern world of ours! Olwen and Ivan, Seeta and Harry, all knew it, and all had kept silence. If they had all kept silence to the very end, they might have acted out their little parts with one another in decorous hypocrisy, and never rendered their mutual intercourse in any way impossible. But once to have openly admitted that fatal truth, which all four of them had begun dimly to suspect in their own minds, was to make the game henceforth impracticable.

CHAPTER XXIII.

NEXT morning, Mohammad Ali called early at the Chicheles'; he had an engagement to walk with Olwen on the Heath, and he kept such engagements with religious devotion. Olwen was fond of her black friend; she got on with him better than with any Englishman. They were to meet Seeta by appointment at the High Bench by ten o'clock. Punctual to the minute, Seeta was there, and a tall, hand-

some man, in a frock coat and glossy hat, sat on the seat beside her. In spite of his heavy black moustache and bushy beard, the delicate contour of his handsome features seemed so perfectly familiar that Mohammad Ali, with his keen eye, felt very little surprised when Seeta, rising to introduce them, said abruptly, "Olwen dear, my brother, Colonel Mayne. Arthur, this is my friend Mrs. Chichele; and my other friend, Dr. Mohammad Ali."

Colonel Mayne bowed respectfully to Olwen, and very distantly, as Olwen observed, to Mohammad Ali. He had served in India, and disliked Baboos; as he himself remarked afterwards to his sister, he had seen too many of them. That any difference of fibre and texture could possibly exist between any one particular Baboo and another was an idea that had never yet entered into Colonel Mayne's simple everyday Anglo-Indian philosophy. A Baboo was a Baboo, as a sheep was a sheep, and there was nothing more to be said about it.

After a minute or two of general conversation, the party resolved itself into two couples, as such parties always tend to do; and Seeta Mayne found herself at last naturally walking with Mohammad Ali, while Olwen went on in front timidly with the redoubtable colonel.

"Your brother has been in India, of course," Mohammad Ali said, as they dropped behind into the second station.

"Yes, he's just returned on a year's leave. He's been stationed for some time at a place called Saharanpur, I believe. But why 'of course,' I wonder, Dr. Ali? I never saw an old Indian in my life who showed so little the sign-manual of the tropics in his face and figure as my brother Arthur."

"Quite true," Mohammad Ali answered quietly. "I judged his oriental experiences entirely by the very distant way he bowed to me. Englishmen in England are always polite to us. Only Englishmen who have been in India ever attempt to treat an Indian gentleman with such studied chilliness."

"Arthur's a foolish fellow," Seeta replied calmly. "He always was and he always will be. All the cleverness in our family ——" and she checked herself suddenly.

Mohammad Ali supplied the remainder of the sentence. "Went off into the women, I suppose," he said with a smile. "I'm not at all surprised at that, for they, perhaps, have quite too much of it. Miss Mayne, I've been waiting long for this opportunity to speak with you alone. I have a question I very much wish to ask you. Are you acting kindly to Mrs. Chichele?"

Seeta's eyes flashed fire at the unexpected inquiry. She drew herself up proudly to her utmost height. "I don't know what right you have to ask me," she cried indignantly. "I love Olwen. I could do nothing on earth that wasn't kindness and goodness itself to her."

"You're fond of her—yes," Mohammad Ali retorted gently, with persuasive softness. "I have eyes in my head. I see that much. But ought you to talk as much as you do with Harry Chichele? Ought you to make as much as you do of him? I'm a black man, Miss Mayne, a privileged person. My disabilities have their countervailing advant-

ages too ; and this is one of them. I may speak freely, for those I esteem, on delicate subjects, where others dare not. Don't you think you do Mrs. Chichele a grave injustice by making yourself all that you have made yourself already to her husband ? ”

Seeta's delicately chiselled nostrils dilated and quivered as she answered with pride, “ You're the last man in the world to reproach me with that, I fancy, Dr. Ali ; for you're in love yourself with Olwen Chichele. ”

Mohammad Ali started for a moment in intense surprise. The *tu quoque* was so sudden, so unexpected, that it fairly took his breath away. “ You—you have no reason on earth to say so, ” he replied hastily. “ I've said or done nothing at all to lead you to suspect it. ”

“ And do you think a woman of my trade needs anything *said or done* to lead her to read a man's heart like an open book ? ” Seeta answered with haughty emphasis. “ Do you think I can't instinctively perceive it in your eyes, in your looks, in your attitudes, in your motion ? You must take me, indeed, for a poor observer ! Doctor Ali, I knew you were in love with Olwen Chichele the very first day I heard you mention her name at Cannes, before ever I saw you two together. The mere long lingering cadence of your voice as you utter those sacred words, ‘ Mrs. Chichele, ’ would tell any one with a pair of ears in their head that you yourself were over head and heels in love with their owner. What on earth is the use of your pretending to deny it ? ”

Mohammad Ali glanced at the bold handsome face in momentary doubt. He hadn't been prepared to see the war thus vigorously carried into Africa. He debated inwardly with himself for a while how to meet the charge. Then he spoke slowly in a calm, resigned, unaffected voice. “ I never said I was *not* in love with her. I *am* in love with her. I've been in love with her ever since I first saw her. I shall always be in love with her as long as I live. There, now, Miss Mayne, will that satisfy you ? ”

Seeta drew a long breath. “ Then, why in heaven's name, ” she asked, turning upon him with a half-maddened look, “ didn't you try to make her marry *you* instead of Harry Chichele ? You had the chance, you know, in Cornwall. ”

“ Marry *me* ! ” Mohammad Ali answered, passionately. “ Marry *me*, do you say ? Do you think I could ever marry a white woman ? No, not for the very love I bore her. Suppose I were by some miracle to succeed in making her, at some moment of emotion, forget my colour—others have done it, and therefore I, too, might conceivably do it—what kind of life, do you think, could I ever offer her ? Would she be happy with me in England ? Would she be happy with me in India ? What am I, do you suppose ? Who am I ? What place in society could I possibly carve out for her ? All her life would be one lifelong struggle and misery, one endless fight against the false position in which, by my cruel love, I had placed her. Do you think I could ever do an English lady the injustice to ask her to lose caste by marrying me ? No, no ; I must walk the world alone, and having found one woman I can truly love, I may love her at a distance without fear of my motives being

misinterpreted, even by those who have the deepest interest and claim in her. So you see our cases are quite different. *You*, with your beauty, and your fame and your intellect, are a menace and a danger for ever to Harry; *I* am nothing at all, and less than nothing, to Olwen Chichele."

He paused for breath, and Seeta looked up at him with sudden admiration. "Mohammad Ali," she said quietly, "you're a grand man. If only you were a white man, I think I could love you."

Mohammad Ali smiled and showed his even rows of pearl-white teeth. "I will not pretend to return the doubtful compliment," he answered sardonically. "But observe that only the fact of my being a black man would ever allow you to speak to me now so freely. That shows the profundity of the gulf between us, doesn't it? That shows how little our cases are parallel—mine with Mrs. Chichele, and yours with her husband."

Seeta Mayne reflected for a minute. "Mohammad Ali," she said again, dropping the customary handle to his name, and speaking with her occasional high-flown solemnity, "listen now to me in turn. I'm a friend of Olwen's; I'm a friend of Harry Chichele's. That's all. Don't try to make it out anything deeper. Do you think the human heart must always move along these shallow grooves of low self-interest and earthly affection? No, no, you don't; for your own heart doesn't so move in your relations towards Olwen. In all you said just now, believe me, you have my profoundest and sincerest sympathy. Why? Because I too can feel with you. Mohammad Ali, I understand *you*: do me the honour to understand *me* in return. I recognize the unselfishness and purity of your motives: do me the justice to recognize the true nature of mine. I feel for Harry Chichele, I tell you truthfully. nothing but an exalted and intellectual friendship, tempered by a deep and lasting personal regard."

"*You* feel," Mohammad Ali repeated eagerly. "Ah, yes, *you* feel so. I never doubted it. I'm not so poor a judge of humanity as to give you credit for any but the highest, the purest, the most idealized motives. You think to yourself that Harry's a delightful and philosophically-minded companion—a man in whose conversation and interchange of thought you take a calm, deep, and noble pleasure—a person fitted by intellect and disposition to be a friend and adviser to such a remarkable woman as you are; and you say in your own mind that with such a woman as you, no shadow of harm can ever arise from your ideal friendship. Miss Mayne, I'm not a fool. I see at once that so far as you yourself are concerned, you're perfectly right; that you can go on feeling always towards Harry Chichele a purely sisterly admiration and affection. But how is it that you—you, Seeta Mayne, the distinguished novelist, whose books are so full of character-study and analysis—you, who trace in infinite diversity the profound influence of character on character, and the intricate reaction of circumstance on circumstance—how is it that you, such as you are, who in any other case would take in at a glance all the actors in the drama and all their several diverse personalities, have here confined your view entirely to

your own part, your own cue, your own motives, and your own isolated figure in the total working? How comes it that you've left out of consideration the effects of your action upon Harry and upon Mrs. Chichele? I say to you, 'You are leading astray that man's affections,' and you answer me back, 'I feel for him only the purest and most sisterly friendship.' I say to you, 'You are blighting that woman's happiness,' and you answer me back, 'I am doing it from the highest and most exalted motives.' Need I tell you that you can't so isolate yourself from all your surroundings. You're intoxicating Harry Chichele's mind. You're poisoning Olwen Chichele's future. You don't mean it. I know you don't mean it. You do it all with the best of motives. But, thank God, I'm a black man; that gives me the right to speak to you so. If I was a white man I wouldn't ever dare to do it. Have pity upon her! Spare her! Spare her!"

Seeta's face was flushed beyond its wont, but she was not angry. She listened to Mohammad Ali's earnest pleading with profound attention, and not a little twinge of remorse. When he had finished, she looked up at him in proud compliance, and uttered only the words, "Thank you."

"Then you'll think of what I say? You'll remember this other side of the question?" Mohammad Ali cried eagerly. "You'll try to save Mrs. Chichele from further trouble?"

"If I ever thought I was going to cause that sweet little friend or mine a single moment's reasonable uneasiness," Seeta Mayne answered, with profound and heartfelt earnestness, "I'd go back to my rooms this very instant, and take a pistol and blow my brains out in expiation."

"Seeta Mayne," Mohammad Ali replied, with a fervid obeisance of oriental gratitude; "you are a strange woman, but I honestly believe at heart a good one. I thought well of you before; I think better of you now than ever."

For ten minutes they said no more. Seeta was busy trying in her own mind to realize the matter in this new aspect. "Do you think, Doctor Ali," she said at last, "Olwen herself thinks hardly of me."

"Mrs. Chichele is an angel," Ali answered softly. "She thinks hardly of no one. But I feel sure she sometimes feels hurt and pained at Harry's evident preference for your society."

"She shall never feel so again," Seeta replied, with a sudden outburst of emotion. "Mohammad Ali, I owe you a thousand thanks—and a bitter grudge for this, too. It will cost me more to let that friendship for Harry Chichele smoulder slowly out—for I can't break it off, I can't break it off suddenly—than it ever cost me to do anything else in this whole miserable ineffective life of mine. But it *shall* smoulder out; you have my word for it. You've darkened my life to-day with a total eclipse; for you don't know how much that friendship has grown to be to me. But I forgive you—I forgive you."

"Seeta Mayne," Mohammad Ali murmured half inaudibly, "you're a good woman, but you don't know your own heart. Nevertheless, I can rest content now. It's all well. I have your word for it."

"You!" Seeta cried. "Yes, you can go home happy, of course. You can rest content. You've broken my heart. But you've saved Olwen's some little external sentimental scratches. If I don't know my own heart, I know yours. You'd massacre a thousand of us in cold blood to save her little finger from aching for a moment."

At the upper bench they rejoined Olwen and the colonel. Seeta's face was calm and quiet now; but her eyes were dark-ringed and sadder than usual. As they came up, they heard the colonel's bland voice, concluding an animated narrative of eastern life to Olwen. "These black fellows are all the same," he was remarking, cheerfully. "I just laid my hand upon the fellow with a gentle tap—the merest touch, I assure you—and he toppled over dead before my eyes—I believe, upon my soul, on purpose to spite me. They've all got enlarged spleens, you know, these natives, and can invariably die at a moment's notice, if they want to get a European into hot water. However the court took a sensible view of the matter, and let me off on making a present of a few rupees to the syce's relations."

"Why, Seeta," the colonel said testily, as he escorted her back to her lodgings from the Chicheles' door, "what a precious long and confidential *tête-à-tête* you were having on the Heath with that confounded Baboo fellow! Dash the man's impudence! Upon my soul, I really thought at one time he was going to have the impertinence actually to shake hands with me."

"Dr. Mohammad Ali," Seeta said defiantly, "whom you choose to describe out of pure race-prejudice as a Baboo—which he isn't—happens to be one of the very few young men that I know who is really and truly worth the trouble of talking to. Will you come in and have a bit of lunch with me, Arthur?"

The colonel whistled a bar from a comic song. "Why, no," he answered. "I think I'll run down into town and take a chop and a glass of claret at the Senior United."

Seeta Mayne went in by herself, and did not eat any lunch at all. She lay on her bed, for the first time since she was a girl in her teens, and cried her proud eyes out with mingled love and anger and shame that Mohammad Ali should have seen so much further into herself and the circumstances than even she had ever dreamt of seeing.

She knew it now for what it was—love, not friendship. She had tried for months to deceive and hoodwink herself, setting before her eyes those harmless little conventional blinds with which all true women in her place endeavour to shut out the light of their own consciences. But the gauzy deceptions had broken down at last, and she knew it now for love and not friendship. Knowing it, too, for what it was, she knew she had but one course left open before her, to let it all die out at once between them, as gently and as lightly and unobtrusively as possible. For Ivan Royle had said the truth. Seeta Mayne was the proudest woman that ever lived, and her very pride would alone have prevented her from doing in word or thought or deed the

slightest imaginary wrong or injustice to Olwen Chichele. If it cost her her life, she would break it off. If her right eye offended her, she would pluck it out, sooner than that harm should come to Olwen. Foolish she might be, but never wicked. She would at least be just, at whatever sacrifice. Her heart was true; she would do what was right and let the heavens crush her.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THAT same afternoon, Mohammad Ali was pottering about, as usual, with the poisons and infusions in Harry Chichele's private laboratory. Harry himself had gone into town to his lectures at the college, and Olwen was out, vainly endeavoring to catch up the arrears of visits which pursue one like one's own evil conscience towards the close of a busy London season. Only little Lizbeth was left to share the freedom of the laboratory with him; for Lizbeth, with her trained and dog-like fidelity and sagacity, alone, among the servants, was trusted to dust and clean up the jars and bottles in that domestic museum of plague, pestilence, famine, battle, murder, and sudden death. In the silence of her own inaccessible little breast, Lizbeth harboured a special grudge against "the blackamoor," as she always called Mohammad Ali. It wasn't merely because he was a black man; race-prejudice is slight or absent among the lowest stratum of the English population; with them, to be black, partaking somewhat of the nature of a distinction, forms rather a ground for respect and consideration than for contempt and rudeness. But little Lizbeth, for her part, never needed a reason of any sort for anything she did or said or thought of. Her small life consisted entirely of a bundle of instincts. And these, as a rule, were singularly true. Like a dog, she recognized untold her master's friends and her master's enemies; she knew at once whom to trust and whom to shrink from. She would have laid down her life for Seeta Mayne the very first time she ever saw her; but she sniffed danger in Mohammad Ali's watchful glance and never-ceasing scrutiny. Her intuition told her that the blackamoor was Olwen's friend, not Harry's; and she felt towards him somewhat as Emir, Harry's Persian cat that dozed so comfortably before the laboratory fire, felt towards Fingal, Olwen's Skye terrier, whenever that misguided drawing-room pet ventured to poke his aristocratic nose within the scientific precincts of the back laboratory.

"'Oo's been upsettin' this ere glass o' typhoid?" Lizbeth inquired in an aggrieved tone, holding up one of the watch-glasses in which Harry Chichele was accustomed to cultivate the germs of that particular form of epidemic in a suitable liquid. "Gone an' wasted mor'n 'arf of it, the lazy thing, 'ooever done it."

"I expect it was Emir," Mohammad Ali answered carelessly. "He's always walking about on tiptoe among the shelves. I often wonder he doesn't poison himself, and all the rest of us into the bargain."

"Emir!" Lizbeth repeated ironically with profound contempt. "Emir, indeed! 'E wouldn't do it! That cat's got every bit as much sense in 'is 'ead as a born Christian, let alone a 'eathen as bows down to stocks an' stones"—which last remark was a misplaced reminiscence of Olwen's careful religious instruction, imparted with difficulty to little Lizbeth's benighted mind. "'E don't never knock down nothink, 'e don't; cats never does. It's two-legged cats as knocks 'em down, that's 'ow I takes it. Potterin' about when the doctor's away, an' playin' with the infusions, an' mixin' up things to bother 'im and fuss 'im! There ain't no keepin' this laboritory straight nohow, with too many cooks spilin' the oppidenmicks. Them thero bacteria won't develop right, because there's a bottle stuck in front to shut the sunlight straight off of 'em. Bacteria don't never come to nothink in the dark, do they? 'Oo put that bottle there, I'd like to know! I spose that was Emir, too, wasn't it? A cat as can move about a bottle in 'is 'ands and set it down in front of another, comes precious near bein' a sort of 'uman, I reckon. Leastways about as near as a 'eathen that in 'is darkness bows down to wood an' stone."

"You display a very rudimentary acquaintance, Lizbeth, with the doctrines of the Prophet," Mohammad Ali answered with good humoured chaff. "Your ignorance of Islam, indeed, is quite exhaustive. It must be the cumulative result of years of study. As I have before had the honour of pressing upon your attention more than once, we of the Moslem faith are not heathens, and we do not bow down to the objects of work you are good enough to specify in such plain and needlessly forcible language. Have the kindness to answer that bell, will you?"

Lizbeth obeyed, glancing round behind her as she went to make quite sure that Mohammad Ali would not in her absence play some heathenish hocus-pocus or other with the bottled cholera or the double extract of Indian bungarus poison. For she took a personal interest in the germs and viruses. They were Harry Chichele's and Lizbeth considered nothing Chichelean alien to her own little personality. She had picked up the externals of Harry's business with most marvellous sharpness. She could distinguish a scarlatina germ under the microscope from a typhus or a malarial at the first glance; and she knew as much about the behaviour of bacilli in culture-liquids, seen with a high power, as the greatest authority in all Germany. In fact, in her empirical unscientific way, she had had by this time a vast and varied experience of germs; she was as much at home with them in real life as the author of the Chichele hypothesis himself, for she passed her time literally in the laboratory, and spent her days among the liquids and infusions.

"Can I see Dr. Ali?" Ivan Royle asked.

"Come in!" Mohammad Ali cried cheerfully. "Here I am, you see; pestling a poisoned poison, as Tennyson puts it. What's the next

article, pray? Will you try our new scarlet fever germs? Is there anything I can do for you, now, in cobras or in cholera?"

Ivan Royle looked little disposed indeed for pleasantry. "No," he said with a sharp accent; "unless, indeed, you can supply me with a little something to put myself out of the way quietly at the shortest possible notice, and with the smallest possible trouble or annoyance to anybody anywhere. Can you send that little imp away for a while? Thanks, that'll do. I've come to say good-bye to you, Ali."

"Good-bye!" Ali echoed. "Why, where on earth are you going, Royle? I didn't know you meant to leave London."

"I didn't yesterday," the painter answered quietly; "I do to-day. I start from Euston this evening by the night mail, and sail to-morrow by the *Aurania* from Queenstown."

"To-morrow! From Queenstown! Then you're going to America. Why, bless my soul, Royle, this is very sudden. What on earth has made you make up your mind so quickly?"

"I didn't make my own mind up," Ivan answered evasively. "My proprietors and lessees made their minds up vicariously for me." I've sold myself for the next two years, body and soul, and pictures, too, for filthy lucre, to the management of the Porte-Crayon. They want me to go to Western America, right amongst the Pikes and Flats and Big Bonanzas, for three purposes all at once—to send them sketches of the scenery for their paper; to draw character-studies for their illustrated edition of Bret Harte: and to paint them two or three big pictures, on commission, for two or three rich American buyers. I saw their advertisement—'Wanted, an artist, to sell his soul for gold'—last night in the *Athenæum*. I went round this morning and saw Christison about it. I closed at once with his offer, and he with mine. I called, on my way back, at the Cunard office, in Pall Mall, to secure my berth. And I join the outward-bound steamer at Queenstown at three o'clock to-morrow."

"But, my dear Royle, this haste is enough to fairly take one's breath away. We orientals are a slow race, you know, and we don't understand such headlong precipitancy. Why on earth do you want to go to America at all, and what possible terms could Christison offer that could make it worth while for you to close with him?"

Ivan Royle played with his eye-glass nervously. "The fact is, Ali," he said at last, "I've come to say good-bye to you for Chichele and Mrs. Chichele. I—I can't stop any longer in England. I must go away. I—I don't like to remain near them any longer."

"I see," Ali answered, with his penetrating glance fixed full on Ivan. "The fact is, my dear fellow, you feel you're not a black man."

Ivan shook himself somewhat impatiently. "Well, that's just about where it is," he replied, in a hesitating tone. "I told Mrs. Chichele a trifle too much of the truth yesterday. I've been suffering agonies of remorse and regret ever since about it; and I saw no other way to get out of the difficulty. Ali, I can never look upon her face again. I can't stop here any longer, in any case. Indeed, I wouldn't even have called this afternoon, if I hadn't known Mrs. Chichele was out and

Harry at the college. I want you to say good-bye to them both for me." And his voice faltered very perceptibly.

"I'm only a black man ; not a man at all, if it comes to that," Ali answered in his softest and most soothing tones. "Everybody confides his troubles to me. Tell me what it is. I more than half guess it already. I've been your friend, from the first, Royle. What did you say ? Make a clean breast of it."

With many stammerings and with much apology Ivan Royle related at last the whole story of his interview the day before with Olwen. At the end of it all, Mohammad Ali looked very grave. "It was a pity you blurted it out," he said at last. "Most truths are better not spoken. We steer our way through life, among many rocks, for the most part by pretending to shut our eyes all round to everything save the little that society recognizes. A world that admitted the truths of things would be a world fit only for angels or for Frenchmen. The Buddhists represent the way of salvation in this planet of ours by the figures of three little squatting monkeys. The first has his hands clapped upon his eyes ; the second has his hands stopping his ears ; the third has his hands pressed close upon his mouth. The moral is, that if you wish to live, you must shut your eyes, you must shut your ears, and you must shut your mouth, and then you may, perhaps, steer clear of evil. I don't blame you. You are a white man. If I were a white man, I might possibly do the same myself. I only thank heaven for my happy immunity. As you say, there's nothing else possible left open to you now. You can't stop here. This is a serious crisis. You must go, of course. In a year or two, perhaps, you may venture to return again."

"Never," Ivan Royle exclaimed gloomily.

"Never's a long word," Mohammad Ali replied, with somewhat less confidence. "We none of us know what a day may bring forth. Kismet, kismet. I stand by and watch life flowing past me like a river ; and I never feel sure what it will bring next.

"At any rate," Ivan said, "you'll keep me informed from time to time of what happens—of how Harry is—and Mrs. Chichele."

"I will," Ali answered. "I know the things that will most interest you. Good luck go with you. And if ever, in the inscrutable ordering of events, any circumstances should chance to arise——"

"No, no," Ivan replied. "Don't even speak of it. You make me feel like a criminal at heart. I'm running away from my own wicked thoughts. Don't try to supply them with fresh imaginings."

That evening, when Harry and Olwen returned, Mohammad Ali invited himself to a cup of afternoon tea in the drawing-room. He told them briefly that Ivan was gone, and had charged him to say his farewells to both of them. As he spoke, he watched Olwen's face closely. She turned a little pale at the first announcement, but said nothing. Harry was left to do all the expression of astonishment. "He was quite right to go," Olwen said after a long pause, not exactly to her husband, nor yet to Ali ; "but—I wish he could have said good-bye to

as himself. One doesn't like an old friend to go away—for ever—that way."

"Ivan's a good fellow," Ali answered simply, "and I don't think he meant it unkindly. It was best, perhaps, he should go without leave-taking."

Olwen knew in her heart of hearts, of course, it was best so. She couldn't have seen him, indeed—she knew that too. And yet—and yet, she was sorry to lose him so. The last words she had ever spoken to him were spoken in anger—in merited anger, but still in anger. And he—he had always been so kind and good to her. She was deeply grieved. Poor dear good fellow!

A woman's heart is a mystery to herself. Here, as elsewhere, bystanders often see most of the game. Olwen knew less herself about her own feelings that summer evening than Mohammad Ali knew about them as he sat and watched her. Mohammad Ali knew what she meant. In spite of all, she was sorry to lose Ivan.

About ten o'clock the same night Colonel Arthur Mayne, Companion of the Most Exalted Order of the Star of India, returned to his sister's lodgings at Hampstead.

"I've found out all about your Baboo, by the way," he said, maliciously, as he flung himself down into an easy chair. "He's the son of a confounded Mohammedan money-lender whom I happen to know for my sins at Saharanpur in the North-West Provinces."

"And to whom, I suppose," Seeta answered with provoking coolness, "you owe the money with which you've come home to your affectionate friends on this present visit."

Colonel Mayne winced. Seeta had unwittingly hit him on the raw. Mohammad Ali's father, as chance would have it, had indeed supplied the sinews of war for his recent journey. "Confound the fellow," he murmured, "with his swell coat and his orchid in his buttonhole! Why the dickens can't he stick to the simple dress of his fathers, I wonder? Figging himself out for all the world like a member of council and a pucker European!"

"It's a glorious, thing, indeed," Seeta answered ironically, "to elevate and educate and Europeanize the natives of India, as I heard you say to Mrs. Chichele this morning—and then to laugh at them for having accepted your proffered education and your European culture."

"Ho!" the colonel observed, with a quick glance at his sister's red eyes. "So the monsoon has burst, has it? Did Ivan Royle call here to-day; then? He came to see me at the club in the course of the afternoon."

"Ivan Royle!" Seeta answered, with profound scorn, wondering at her brother's sudden change of subject. "Oh, dear no. He's seldom here. He spends most of his time at the Chichele's, I fancy."

"Small blame to him, then," Colonel Mayne responded gaily. "Nice little body, that little Mrs. Chichele. Good eyes; capital figure! Took a great fancy to her myself this morning. But he won't go there any more in future, anyhow. He's off to America."

"Off where?" Seeta cried, astonished.

"America," the colonel repeated calmly. "Yes, I said America. A-M-E-R-I-C-A—America. To be quite definite, and accurate, and succinct, New York, New York City. I believe the city is an invariable addition with the native-born citizen. He's gone off at a moment's notice to do some illustrations for a paper they call the *Portmanteau* or the *Portfolio*, or the *Porte-Crayon*, or the *Porte-Cochere*, or something of that sort.

"What did he go for?" Seeta asked quietly.

"Don't I tell you, he went to do some pictures for this port-something-or-other?" her brother responded with a sharp look.

Seeta glanced over at him with supreme contempt. "That's what he's going to do when he gets there," she said in a withering voice. "What I want to know is why he's gone. And I guess why, to. I might have foreseen it. He couldn't stop in England any longer. A curious coincidence. Such things *will* happen.

CHAPTER XXV.

FOR some days Seeta Mayne saw no more of Harry Chichele. Uncertain in her own mind how to proceed, she endeavoured as far as possible to avoid him. She stood, indeed, between two fires. On the one hand, her promise to Mohammad Ali bound her down to renounce her friendship with Harry for ever; and even if Seeta had not recognised in her inmost heart the truth of all the Indian had told her about Olwen's feelings, her very pride and sense of womanhood would have urged her hard to keep the compact she had made with him on the Heath that summer morning. On the other hand, she shrank with unspeakable shrinking from a definite breach with Harry Chichele. Apart from her strong regard and affection for him, her mere sense of consistency and continuity pulled hard against the idea of unsaying again what she had said to him so plainly so short a time ago:—"Harry, you are very, very dear to me; let us tread the mountain heights of human thought and human sympathy hand-in-hand together always." How could she go back now upon that solemn declaration of undying friendship. How could she retract those binding words so soon, within a few weeks of the time she had first uttered them? It was easy enough for Seeta, in a moment of heated emotion, to give her word to Ali on the Heath that day that she would let her friendship for Harry Chichele smoulder out slowly—that Olwen should never feel hurt again at her conduct, that all should be forgotten and broken off between them; but it was hard indeed to put that easy promise into actual practice—hard to face Harry himself—Harry to whom she had said so much and so earnestly—and to tell him they must never more be even friends, scarcely more be even everyday acquaintances. Her very pride

stood sternly in the way. Pride on this side and pride on that, tore her heart remorselessly in either direction.

But if she could not tell Harry, far less could she let the friendship die away by degrees, as she first imagined, without ever saying anything at all to him about it. That would be the most cowardly course of all; that would degrade her in her own eyes by making her seem to Harry himself one of those light unstable women whose fitting affections come and go, who breathe to-day the fiercest emotion, and forswear themselves to-morrow out of pure fickleness. Women like that she hated and despised. She could not let herself be numbered with them. She must tell Harry why she would break with him. She must save at least her own self-respect. She must let him know she was making a terrible sacrifice, and making it for pure and unselfish reasons.

Her courage would have failed her, however, to seek an interview. She waited till one was thrust upon her by circumstances.

At the end of a week the chance came. Seeta was sitting at her desk one morning, idly pretending to correct the manuscript of her last new unfinished novel—what was fame or money to her nowadays?—when a well-known rat-tat-tat sounded at the door, and Harry, alone, was ushered into her study.

Seeta rose, majestic, to meet him. Never before had Harry seen her look so grand, or statuesque, or queenlike. She moved across the room with the gait of a goddess, gliding gently over the soft rich carpet with a sort of imperceptible easy motion. Her white hand stretched out to clasp his own. She looked at him long in strange silence. Harry felt sure some profound emotion was deeply stirring her. She held his hand for fully a minute; then she let it drop again, and seated herself with evident fatigue in the small armchair. She motioned Harry to the big one with her hand. He took it, silently, and turned towards her with a look of wondering inquiry.

"Olwen's quite uneasy because you haven't been to see us for so many days together," he said hastily. "She sent me round to see if you were ill. You've never left us so long unvisited before, Seeta. Olwen's quite annoyed with you, she told me to tell you."

"Olwen's a darling," Seeta Mayne answered, with choking throat. "It was very good of her to send you round. Circumstances have made it extremely difficult for me to call at your house of late. You see, my brother's visit —"

Harry looked at her half reproachfully. "Why, Seeta," he cried in a pained tone, "Olwen and I flattered ourselves we were at least as much to you as many brothers."

Seeta strove hard to master that tell-tale voice of hers. "Harry," she said, "don't press me too hard. I've suffered much, very much, since I saw you. Harry, Harry," and she broke down utterly. "It must be all up, all up between us. I have done wrong, very, very wrong. You, perhaps, have done wrong too. I don't know. I'm not sure about it. Now we have both to pay the penalty. I must leave London; I must never see you again while I live. It is terrible, but

it is right. I know now that I have been unconsciously and unwillingly wronging Olwen."

"Wronging Olwen?"

"Yes, by taking part of your heart away from her, Harry."

"Seeta, Seeta, this is terribly sudden. You don't mean it! You can't mean it. You're not really going to leave me for ever and ever! Seeta—I will say it—I love you, I love you. I love you as I've never loved in my life before. I mean what I say. If you go I shall feel my house is indeed left unto me desolate."

Seeta had risen from her chair at the word, and stood like a statue now before him. "Harry," she said, with slow emphasis, "you are doing very, very wrong to say so. It isn't right, it isn't right to Olwen. You've sealed my determination, if it needed sealing. Go back to Olwen? Go back to her! Go back to her! You're her's, not mine! How dare you speak like that to me, sir?" And for a moment her anger flared up genuinely. "Remember who I am and what I am! How dare you insult me by speaking so to me?"

Harry fell back a pace toward the study door. "Because it's the truth," he answered boldly and doggedly.

Seeta flung herself once more into the chair and burst into a sudden flood of tears. "I know it's the truth," she cried earnestly. "Harry, forgive me! What am I to do? Oh, what am I to do? You know the truth. Harry, I——"

"Love you!"

Seeta let her hand drop listlessly by her side. "Go home," she cried, flinging back her head and displaying her proud imperial throat in all its exquisite sculpturesque beauty. "I never said so. Go back to Olwen! It's your duty. You know it. I've promised I'll have nothing more to do with you in future. Our friendship must cease henceforth and for ever. To-day is the last of it. Go, go; go at once! Why stop to torture me here any longer?"

Harry seated himself with a contrite air on a low chair near the hearthrug beside her. He tried to take her bloodless hand in his, but she drew it away hastily with feminine pride and resolution. "Seeta," he said, in a soft low voice, a persuasive voice, gentle and melodious, "why may it not still be friendship? Friendship is surely no sin against Olwen. You said so yourself; why unsay it? You and I were made by nature for one another. I feel more deeply now than ever how much we were built each for his fellow. I can't go away. I must stop with you."

Seeta made no audible answer at all, though her lips quivered, but rocked herself up and down in her easy chair in silent misery, like a wounded creature. Her heart was torn asunder within her.

Encouraged by her silence, Harry went on. He talked to her long, earnestly, passionately. Seeta listened—she could not choose but listen, but her mind was fully made up now, and she only shook her head with mournful persistence at all his pleadings. "No, no," she said; "you've yourself pronounced the doom of our friendship. You've sung its requiem. You've dug a grave for it. The moment that you

uttered those fatal words, 'Seeta I love you,' you made mere friendship henceforth impossible for ever. Harry, I won't be untrue to Olwen. *You* may be untrue to her, but *I* will not. I shall leave London. I shall go at once. I shall save her from her husband. You shall see no more of me."

"Seeta, Seeta! Olwen can never, never be to me what you have been, what you are and will always be."

"Harry, Harry! Don't say so! I know it! Nobody could ever feel towards you as profoundly as I feel. No woman ever yet——" She was going to say "loved as I love;" but she checked herself in time, and substituted for it, "thought as I think."

Harry threw himself back in his chair in turn and groaned aloud. He knew he loved her. He knew she loved him. He had forgotten all about Olwen now; he could think of nothing on earth but Seeta—Seeta.

Presently, Seeta rose from her chair once more. She rose this time calm and deliberate. The storm of her passion had swept through her now, and left her resolute, determined, cold, unflinching. She gave her hand with queenly dignity to Harry. "Good-bye," she said, "good-bye for ever."

"Am I really to go?" he asked, in a voice trembling with subdued emotion.

"You are really to go," Seeta answered firmly.

He took her hand and pressed it in his own. "Good-bye, Seeta," he said. "The happiest dream of my existence has faded for ever. Henceforth we two shall live like severed halves of one divided being. Nature meant us for one another. The wretched conventions and dogmas of men have kept us asunder."

"Go," Seeta repeated. "I can't bear it any longer. Go at once, Harry. Go, go, and spare me."

"I will go," Harry answered, with tears in his eyes, half turning towards the door. "Good-bye, Seeta. Good-bye for ever. I'm going now. But just this once—for a last farewell—this once only—you will not refuse me!" And he held out his face temptingly to kiss her.

For a moment, Seeta almost yielded basely to her overwrought feelings. She was a woman, and she loved him unutterably! She pursed up her lips and held them out obediently towards his. Harry bent his head eagerly forward to meet them. Then, with a sudden gesture of horror and remorse, she came to herself again. Womanly dignity reasserted its sway. Before Harry had time to press his eager lips to hers, she withdrew her face, now hot and crimson, and cried aloud with a mingled cry of shame and indignation, "Never, never! while Olwen lives, you shall never touch them! Cruel, cruel! how dare you attempt it! Your lips are hers! Your heart is hers! Go home to her now! Go home to Olwen!"

As she spoke she opened the study door and swept past him haughtily with her rustling train, into the narrow passage and up the dim staircase to her own bedroom. Harry, left alone in the study by himself, did not move or stir an inch for some minutes. He merely hung him-

self back in the easy chair, with his hand on his forehead, and let his own wild thoughts whirl round and round in strange eddies through his fevered brain, alive now with terrible phantasms of his imagination.

How innocently one may speak a hasty word which brings some unspeakable and unthinkable calamity on some helpless person !

When Seeta said, "While Olwen lives," she only meant to reject, in the strongest and most positive terms that occurred to her, Harry Chichele's cruel and wicked advances. Olwen was his wife ; while Olwen lived no other woman had a right to his love or any part of it.

But to Harry Chichele, with his bold, unscrupulous, emancipated intelligence, sitting there by himself and thinking her words deliberately over in the easy chair, they conveyed a very different suggestion indeed from the one which Seeta meant to convey by them. "While Olwen lives !" Yes, yes ; that was quite clear. Seeta Mayne was a high-spirited and strong-minded woman. Profoundly as he knew she loved him in her heart, while Olwen lived, he was sure that she would have nothing more to say to him. He understood her well enough to feel certain of that. While Olwen lived ! While she lived ! Just so. Then there was that one chance yet open to him in the future. Olwen was young and strong and vigorous ; but accidents—accidents happen everywhere. Who could say what sort of accident might not happen some day to Olwen ?

While Olwen lives ! While Olwen lives ! As Harry Chichele walked slowly home, with his head whirling and eddying and swimming around him, that one chance sentence, dropped by accident from Seeta's lips, kept floating ever visibly before his eyes, ringing in his ears, echoing in his heart, absorbing and monopolizing his entire being. If ever anything should happen to Olwen—and, after all, we are all mortal—why, then, he might yet be happy with Seeta. Seeta loved him ; she had more than admitted it ; if only by some passing caprice of nature Olwen were removed some day from their path, he and Seeta might yet walk the mountain heights of life together. The mountain heights of life ! Ay, ay, ineffable peaks of glory. What mountain heights they seemed, indeed ! He with Seeta, Seeta with him—what pinnacles of thought, what summits of fame, what Alps and Himalayas of human greatness, they two might scale and conquer in unison !

But, oh, the cruel irony of fate ! Olwen lived ; and Seeta had said good-bye to him forever ! Forever is a very long time. Still, even so, there was yet hope. Who knows what a single day may bring forth ? Accidents may happen to all of us at any time. A medical man is the last man on earth to count too confidently on length of days for anybody anywhere. Constitutions are so very precarious. The chapter of accidents is practically infinite ; all medical science is but the carefully compiled index to its endless possibilities.

At his own door, Olwen met him with a frank smile. He kissed her tenderly on her smooth little forehead. It was a sort of kindly paternal kiss ; excellent, good little girl, Olwen ! "Seeta's all right," he cried, in answer to her timid inquiring look ; "but she's been busy

of late with this precious brother of hers, and she's thinking soon of leaving London."

"Leaving London!" Olwen cried in surprise. "Why, London will seem like a desert now without her."

Harry smiled a sad, short smile. A desert, indeed! To him no Sahara could ever be more terrible.

That evening Harry lay on the sofa in the drawing-room, consulting a large and heavy book. It was all full of endless tables and figures. Olwen glanced casually over his shoulder as he read. She saw it was a book of medical statistics, by a certain Dr. Farr, of the Registrar General's office. The column Harry was glancing at, bore at its top the simple inscription, "Expectation of Female Life between the Ages of Twenty and Thirty." Olwen was not at all surprised. Harry was always working at such abstruse subjects.

As she looked, the servant brought her in a little twisted pencil-written note. It was addressed to her hastily in Seeta's handwriting. "My darling Olwen," it said simply, "I need your advice, your help, your sympathy. I shall leave London for a tour in Norway with my brother, to-morrow. When I return it will be to Italy, not to England. Come round in the morning alone and see me. It may, perhaps, be for the last time.—Yours ever devotedly, S. M."

Harry looked over her shoulder in dismay. Would Seeta betray him to Olwen, he wondered. He slept but little that weary night. It was bad enough to have to part with Seeta—estrangement from Olwen at the same time would be more than his lacerated heart could bear. Truly, truly, his punishment had come. He had sown the wind—he was reaping the whirlwind.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE age of our affections cannot be measured by days, and weeks, and months, and years, as computed at the Royal Observatory, Greenwich. They are old in proportion to their relative strength. There are emotions that burn themselves into the very core and centre of our minds at a few moments' notice, too profoundly to be ever again eradicated. There are faces we have seen but for half an hour in a lifetime, which, nevertheless, we cannot hope to forget while life itself remains at all to us. There are affections and friendships formed in a few weeks of happy intercourse, which mean more to us than many ordinary perfunctory acquaintanceships of long standing and ineffable dullness. New as they are, they have interwoven themselves at once with subtle strands into the inmost fabric of our mental being; they have entwined themselves with the warp and woof of our spiritual existence. They are plants that grow apace in fruitful soil. To uproot them is to tear asunder the very basis and foundation of our nature; like Jonah's

gourd, they have flourished in a day so as to enshroud and overshadow our entire personality.

So Seeta Mayne felt that summer day towards Harry Chichele. In spite of all her flighty eloquence and wayward moods, she was at heart a woman of profound principle; she knew she had acted wrong to Olwen, and she knew she must submit to bear the merited punishment of her wrong-doing. But it cost her hard for all that. The wrench was terrible. And most terrible of all, she had of necessity to endure it in silence and alone; she could look nowhere on earth for help or sympathy. For, to speak of it to Olwen, would be to wreck and ruin poor Olwen's happiness; and Seeta was far too humane, as well as far too proud, to venture on such a base and cruel line of action. She must smother her grief somehow in her own breast though it burnt like fire, and go about the world cheerfully with her brother Arthur, as if nothing at all had happened to disconcert her.

When Olwen came, Seeta flung her arms around her neck wildly, told her with many hot tears she was in great trouble, asked for her love, her caresses, her sympathy, but never whispered one single word to her about Harry's visit. She only repeated, over and over again, that something had happened, some dreadful thing had happened, to drive her away for ever from London. She would never, never more return to this hateful England. She had always hated it; she hated it now worse than ever. Olwen must write to her very, very often, and perhaps in the winter, when Harry could spare her, run down to Florence by herself for a week or two to comfort and console her. "I shall never come again as long as I live. Kiss me, but don't ask me why, for heaven's sake, my darling."

Olwen, dimly speculating in her own mind, thinking first of Ivan Royle's hasty departure, and then of Seeta's equally hurried and mysterious journey, vaguely guessed in her simple way the whole sad truth; but, for very womanliness, she refused to admit it even to herself. It must be something connected with Colonel Mayne's affairs, she pretended to believe; Seeta must be going so unexpectedly to Norway to please and humor her scapegrace brother. These military men have always debts and complications and heaven knows what; and Seeta had hinted to her more than once that day that Arthur's finances were distinctly complicated.

But when she had seen Seeta off that afternoon by the Hull train, and returned herself with red eyes to her darkened home in Queen Anne's Road, she realized all at once, as she sat in her own bedroom, the utter loneliness of her situation. Seeta gone; Ivan gone; she was left alone—alone with Harry. Once she would have thought that the pinnacle of happiness—but now! She longed and yearned for living sympathy; and Harry—Harry could not possibly give it to her. The terrible truth came home to her with a flash; it was sympathy in her relations with Harry himself for which she was longing and yearning so eagerly.

That evening Mohammad Ali stopped, as he often did, at the Chicheles' to dinner. Grave, gentle, chivalrous as ever, to-night he was

even more tender and respectful to Olwen than usual. Olwen half fancied once or twice in her own mind that her black friend must really have divined her inmost thoughts, and that he was trying his best to show himself sympathetic and generous to her in her unspoken trouble. She shrank from the belief, and yet it pleased her. Even a black man's sympathy is better than nothing.

If only Seeta could have stopped in England ! Irrational as it was to think so, Olwen, nevertheless, felt that if only she could have Seeta's sympathy she would not mind so much about Harry. She longed with exceeding great longing for her rival's presence ; she felt as if she could have cried, " Oh, Seeta, Seeta, come back at once, and let what will in any way happen. I care for nothing if only I have your dear affection."

Months went by, and the Chichele household behaved externally to all outer observers exactly the same as it had ever done. Harry was studiously polite and attentive to Olwen ; Olwen was watchful and careful of Harry's comfort. Only Mohammad Ali, with his piercing oriental eye, in and out of the house from day to day, recognized in his keen way that this was at best but a *modus vivendi*. The high contracting parties had struck a silent concordat with one another. They never acknowledged the humiliating fact even to their own hearts and consciences ; but they were living now, as the world phrases it, " very comfortably, don't you know, together."

Never acknowledged it even to themselves ! Well, at any rate, Olwen didn't. For, as to Harry, those three words, " While Olwen lives," had sunk profoundly into the very core and root of his soul, and branded themselves deep into his inmost brain-structures. They danced like a vision before his waking eyes ; they rang like a chorus in his sleeping ears ; they accompanied him about in the streets and the parks, and the college lecture rooms ; they obtruded themselves even into his chemical formulas, and disturbed by their presence with rude familiarity his scientific work at the ætiological laboratory. Every day and all day long he thought to himself of that prospective possible time when Olwen might stand in his way no longer, and when he and Seeta might be happy together. Seeta had woven herself now into the thread of his destiny ; he could not think her out of it again ; without Seeta there was no day-dream or hope or scheme for the future conceivable any longer for Harry Chichele.

And the infatuation grew daily worse and worse. By dint of continually thinking about Seeta as the permanent reality, and of Olwen as a merely temporary and removable accident, likely sooner or later to disappear from the scene, he got at last to make no long plans ahead in any way for Olwen, but to hold himself always in readiness, as it were, for her final disappearance from the stage at any minute. He bore her no sort of grudge or ill-will indeed ; on the contrary, in a passive, habitual, stereotyped kind of way, he liked her or loved her as well as ever—at least since their first regular settling down into the quiet humdrum of matrimonial existence. She was a gentle, lovable, affectionate little thing ; and it was not in his nature to do otherwise than return her

proffered affection. He was fond of Olwen, as he was fond of Emir, the Persian cat, and fond of Fingal, the shaggy Skye terrier. They all alike were dear to him, each in their own fashion. But just as he would never have let Emir or Fingal stand in the way of any serious project he had formed for Olwen's happiness, so he would never have let Olwen herself stand in the way of his own more serious and deliberate plans for himself and Seeta.

So the months rolled on ; and autumn succeeded summer in turn ; and the Chicheles took their seaside holiday, and returned once more to Queen Anne's Road, and to the work and drudgery of another session. Winter came, and spring in its wake ; and still Harry found Olwen ever there, a very solid and indubitable fact, by no means inclined to melt into mist, and not in the least more likely to clear the way for him and Seeta than she had ever been from the very beginning of all things. Seeta wrote to her from time to time affectionate letters, full of her love and gratitude and remembrances ; and at the end of every letter recurred with sickening sameness the stereotyped phrase, " With very kind regards to Dr. Chichele." That was all ! Great heavens, what irony ! The romance of his life, the dream of his love, had faded down to that one pale phrase ! " Very kind regards to Dr. Chichele ! "

He was working one day in the succeeding summer at some microscopic business in the laboratory with Ali. Germs were now somewhat at a discount. By this time, they had been well-nigh fairly exploded, and the famous Chichele hypothesis itself was pretty well dead and buried in oblivion. But other ideas had cropped up meantime to supersede them, and there was still work and pay in plenty for Harry Chichele. Nevertheless, he was by no means in his usual spirits that afternoon. Things had been going but ill lately. Olwen was sleepless and constantly out of sorts—worried and anxious at his apparent want of affection, he fancied. One can't be always at the very white heat of conjugal devotion—especially when you've found out you married in error. Harry Chichele had long since made that disenchanting discovery. He took up listlessly the evening paper which Lizbeth, now growing to a tall and comparatively well-built girl, brought in to him as it came, and glancing over its items with a careless eye he stopped at last with a sudden " Whew ! " and turned round to Ali to communicate something.

" Here's grist for the mill," he cried with a somewhat awkward little laugh. " Listen here, Ali ; what do you say to this ? ' Suspicious Epidemic in Bermondsey and Rotherhithe—We learn with regret that several cases of what is declared by high medical authority '—meaning, of course, the local practitioner, poor penniless devil !—' to be an aggravated form of Asiatic cholera have occurred during the last two days among the foreign sailors who crowd the low lodging-houses in Bermondsey and Rotherhithe. Where is Professor Chichele, we wonder ? Now, we venture to say, is the time for testing the value of his much-vaunted inoculation process. With the present high temperature and sultry weather, all suspicious cases should be carefully watched by the sanitary authorities. An epidemic under such conditions '—and so

forth, and so forth, with the usual talkee-talkee. We must inquire into this, of course, Ali. It means work for you and me. I'll go down to Bermondsey as soon as ever I've finished this preparation. Here you, Lizbeth ; run out for a hansom ! ”

Lizbeth nodded and disappeared like lightning. Harry went on fiddling cautiously with his preparation, while he kept an eye on the paper at the same time, propped up between two bottles on the laboratory table. “ There's another item in our way, too,” he continued after a moment's pause. “ I see they've caught that poor unfortunate Salisbury murderer fellow. Never saw anything clumsier in the way of a murder in all my life. The poor man gave the girl antimony enough to stock a churchyard. Great lumbering idiot, I'm sorry for him, anyhow. The contents of the stomach consist literally of hardly anything but tartar emetic. Absurd ! Absurd ! What asses these men are, really ! But I'm sorry they caught him, for all that. He made such a plucky fight for life. They've taken him at last in an open boat off the Kerry coast, trying to row across the Channel to Brittany ! Pity he should have let the police outwit him: after his bold strike for freedom at Dublin. One's sympathies always go with the hunted. And, besides, she led him such a life, they say. You can't wonder a man who's married to a nagging devil like that sometimes gives it up in utter despair, and puts an end at once to his tormentor by a trifling dose of poison. But antimony, of all things in the world ! And a bucketful of that ! So vulgar ! So stupid ! So obvious ! So easily detected ! ”

“ It's one of the great safeguard's for the sanctity of human life,” Mohammad Ali observed watching the Englishman hard with a closer and more cat-like scrutiny than ever, “ that most murderers are ignorant fools who don't know how to conceal their criminal practices. The misfortune is, that some able and instructed men are murderously inclined too, and that these can often escape even the shadow of suspicion through their acquired skill and their professional knowledge. But sooner or later, I believe, their sin always finds them out ; some person whom they have never themselves suspected, suspects them and watches them, and brings their guilt home to them after many days—or weeks, or months, or years even.”

Harry looked up with a sharp quick turn of the head at Ali. “ There's a precious lot of rubbish talked everywhere,” he said tartly, “ about this so-called sanctity of human life and the utter certainty of the discovery of murder. Pure artificial bolstering up of the conventional morality—that's what I call it. Murder will out, they say—of course it will, my dear fellow, when it's done so clumsily that everybody can see at a glance it's murder. But how about the thousand and one gentle removals which must always be happening, but which never come out as murders at all ?—the removals so carefully and dexterously planned that not one soul on earth, however sharp-eyed, even dreams of suspecting them for anything but natural deaths ? You talk like a child, I assure you, Ali, not like a man and a doctor of science, as you really are. Murders are just like everything else. Sometimes they're discovered, and sometimes they're not. Fools get found out, or run to

earth, or blab on themselves—wise men keep their own counsel. That's just about the long and the short of it."

"'Ansom, sir," Lizbeth said, popping in her head at the half-open door with a sudden jerk, and interrupting her master. Harry checked his eloquent harangue, laid down his microscope slides at once in haste, and, taking his hat, went out to the hansom. Ali looked after him in doubt and hesitation. Could any more evil be brewing for Olwen?

Just before dinner the Englishman returned once more, in excellent spirits, with three little phials in his gloved hand, carefully corked and disinfected.

"What do you think of it?" Mohammad Ali asked, a trifle anxiously.

"Think? Oh, well, they're capital cases. I'm awfully glad I went to see them. Wouldn't have missed them for fifty pounds. Doubtfully Asiatic, but distinctly virulent. I've got a lot of germs here, selected from three distinct localities. One of them's a Levantine sailor at Rotherhithe—he's magnificent; one's a Lascar from a sium at Wapping—extremely interesting; and one's Spanish, from a Malaga brig at the Pool by the Tower—as near Asiatic as you can go without gutting it. I'm going to compare them with the mitigated Polperrans, and the original Santanders, this very minute, as well as with those Algerian cases of Pasteur's that he sent me yesterday. Lizbeth, hand over the microscope on the table here, will you? New germs to the fore; all alive and kicking?"

Lizbeth brought forward the instrument sedulously, and stood watching the adjustment with all the interest of an experienced connoisseur. When Harry Chichele had looked himself at the first specimen, and allowed Mohammad Ali to peep for a minute or two, he motioned Lizbeth silently with his hand to take her turn at inspecting the newcomers. Lizbeth gazed at them long and lovingly. Then she said in a very decided voice, with her eyes still steadily fixed on the eye-piece, "Them's not Asiatic! Not a bit like it! I should call 'em more in the way of English cholerer, I should. There ain't a single well-made commer-shaped among 'em, anywheres. Real Asiatic always 'as a big round 'ead, and a little twisty tail like a tadpole's, a-squirmin' and wrigglin' up and down behind 'em."

"You're quite right, Lizbeth," Harry Chichele answered, with evident pride in his *protege's* proficiency. "They're not Asiatic—not genuine orientals. But they're good enough for an English epidemic, anyhow. I haven't seen anything so vigorous or virulent for a very long time. I was quite delighted when I got that lot. They're as lively as grigs and as jolly as sandboys, under the microscope, aren't they?"

"And the patient?" Mohammad Ali asked suggestively.

"The patient?" Harry echoed with careless unconcern, as who should suddenly have his attention called to a perfectly unimportant side-issue of the case under consideration. "Oh, the patient's dead, of course; dead as a door nail; died while I waited; simply eaten up internally with these lively little creatures. They positively swarmed,

and hustled, and thronged in every part of his infested body. Never saw such a deluge in all my life. Virulent! I should say so! A drop of that stuff on the slide this moment would go further than a whole bottleful of best prussic acid."

As he spoke, he poured a little of the infusion into a clean watch-glass, and writing a label on a slip of gummed paper, fastened it on the back with a clear inscription, "No. 1, Levantine sailor in lodging-house at Rotherhithe." Lizbeth received the glass obediently from his hands, and with grave care placed it on the accustomed experimental shelf, where new bacteria were always deposited, while Harry proceeded with equal minuteness to examine in detail all the other specimens.

He paused after a moment, and looked up once more. "Olwen's still terribly sleepless, Ali," he said casually.

"The morphia doesn't do her any good, does it?" Ali asked with a quiet sigh.

"Not the least good. It seems almost to have lost its power. I've been injecting very strong lots for nights past, but I must double the dose if she's to get any rest. She's troubled and tried. I'm afraid she's been over-tasked and over-excited lately."

CHAPTER XXVII.

ALL the next morning, Mohammad Ali noticed that Harry Chichele seemed exceptionally grave, taciturn, and pre-occupied. He mooned about among the bottles and test-tubes with the air of a man whose mind is quite otherwise engaged than his body. Ali had seen him so but once before; and even Lizbeth dimly remembered the mood as familiar. The precedent was a fateful one. It had been on the day preceding the one when the woman Wilcox, Lizbeth's mother, died suddenly in her cot at Regent's Park Hospital.

Surely, thought Mohammad Ali to himself, the man must mean mischief.

Outwardly calm and grave, indeed, Harry Chichele's mind was inwardly perturbed with a fierce storm of conflicting emotions. For this step that he was contemplating darkly in his soul now was of a very different sort from the "little episode" of other days; a sort that might make even the emancipated and philosophic mind debate and reflect with itself somewhat before venturing to plunge into definite action. A miserable, bloated, drunken woman—yes, yes, that was all very well in its way! But this time! This time! Ah, so different this time! Harry hardly cared himself to face it.

Olwen had received a letter from Seeta Mayne that very morning—a letter with some passing gleam of hope in it for Harry. Distance and time had mitigated Seeta's fears to herself and of him; she had no

far melted as to say this time, "Give my kindest remembrances to your dear husband, and tell him I often live over again the happy days we three once spent together at Cannes and at dear old Hampstead." It was more than she had ever before permitted herself to say about him, and it had set Harry's heart throbbing violently with the dim and futile hope of yet some day reseeing Seeta.

"Never, never! While Olwen lives you shall never touch them!" How often he had pursed up his lips in fancy, and said those words over again to himself! What terrible comfort they seemed to bring to him. "While Olwen lives." What a merciful proviso!

In the corner of the laboratory, when Mohammad Ali was not looking, he took out that day from his watch-pocket the little gold locket that Olwen had given him when they were first married. He opened it, and looked at the face in the front. It was Olwen's face, pretty little Olwen's—a tender, simple, wifely small face, but with nothing of soul or grandeur in it, he said to himself vaguely, to bind and satisfy such a man as he was. Then he dived with his hands into his pocket once more, and, furtively glancing around, pulled out his penknife. With the small blade he egged out of the locket its inner gold frame, and displayed behind it another photograph—the photograph of a proud, imperious woman, of clear-cut features and high white forehead—a woman with splendid large grey eyes, full of unspeakable thought and majesty—a woman whom painters and poets had flattered to the full with brush and with pen—a woman to love, and to live and die for—a woman for whose sake many a man that day would gladly have faced and endured the unutterable. She might have been his, and now—he was Olwen's! He pressed his mouth to the cold, hard glass that cruelly covered them. "Never, never; while Olwen lives!" The words seemed to echo like a death-knell through his brain. But whose death-knell? He shut the locket again with a sharp little snap. The die was cast. This time, in his haste, he had left Seeta's portrait outermost by accident.

For months he had carried that locket at his breast. To all outer seeming it was Olwen's portrait. But Olwen's portrait was merely a blind. In the very background and rear of all, Seeta's proud face lay ever next his heart, concealed and masked only by Olwen's. Now, he had inadvertently thrown off the mask. The face that showed in front that day was Seeta's—Seeta's.

He replaced the locket hastily, with a sigh, in his fob. Was it mere fancy, or did he really observe that Mohammad Ali, engaged at the far end of the room at a big glass retort, with his back turned, was stealthily watching his reflection in its bowl, and detecting the damnatory little incident of the portrait? It was clear he must be very careful now, for Ali was watching him. A dangerous man to reckon with, Ali.

How that terrible design had first taken shape in Harry Chichele's own mind he himself could hardly have said. It grew up, no doubt, by slow degrees, from natural half-hints and vague foreshadowings, till, like some fungoid growth, it seemed at last to usurp and absorb his whole brain, to overshadow and swallow up his entire nature. It

had begun with the purest abstract speculation—if only Olwen were removed from his path! There is no harm in anticipating contingencies. It had gone on next to calculation of chances—Olwen might possibly drop out quietly in this, that, or the other conceivable fashion. People die so often of disease or accident. It had come at last to deliberate contrivances—Olwen must be got rid of at all hazards. A terrible declension, too ghastly and fatal for most of us even to realize; but natural, consistent, nay, even inevitable to such a warped and twisted idiosyncrasy as Harry Chichele's.

He lounged over to the window, as if by accident, and began washing out a little pipette, such as doctors use for injecting morphia. It was important that everything should be done openly and above-board—that there should not be in any way the faintest pretence of secrecy or concealment, the merest shadow of suspicion about all his acts; especially with such a fellow as Ali watching him. Ali might guess a great deal, indeed—much good in guessing with our English jury system—but he should know nothing—nothing on earth upon which to found even a tangible rumour, a libel worth inquiring into. He would be forced to keep his doubts, if he had any, in his own breast, as he had done already, Harry well knew, in the forgotten case of the woman Wilcox. The man of science smiled to himself a quiet smile of calm superiority as he thought of the clumsy, blundering, dunder-headed attempts of mere vulgar everyday unscientific assassins, like the man who was caught off the coast of Kerry. The telltale blood-stains, the knife or pistol purchased openly at a shop three days before using it, the empty phial that held the poison, the accusing evidence of the chemist's assistant, the stealthy preparations, the carefully-planned flight that betrays itself at last by its silly complexity! How empty and puerile they all seemed, to be sure! How different from the cool and masterly simplicity with which a great thinker lays his plans and carries out his schemes to a successful termination! He hugged himself with delight and pride at the thought of his own open and unaffected frankness!

Detection was impossible! Absolutely impossible! The acutest physician that ever breathed could never bring his contemplated crime fairly home to him. The keenest lawyer that ever held a brief could never discover one single atom of compromising evidence. The cause of death—if the patient died—would be certified as from purely natural causes. He defied post-mortems and coroner's inquests, and all the other inane formalities by which offended justice endeavours to fasten the guilt of murder upon the assassin's shoulders. His method would leave not a trace behind. In its way, it was simply a perfect adaptation of means to an end, a supreme triumph of modern applied pathological knowledge.

Yet, for all that, his fingers trembled with unwonted anxiety as he washed and cleaned out the little pipette, the intended instrument of his hideous purpose.

Mohammad Ali watched him all the time in profound silence, but with unceasing vigilance. Harry was aware that the Indian's eyes

were intently fixed upon his tremulous fingers. He knew the Indian could see how they trembled. But he wiped the pipette on a clean cambric handkerchief with the most scrupulous care, and said abruptly in a careless tone, "Olwen had another very bad night last night, I'm sorry to say. She seems to have fallen into a thoroughly sleepless and nervous condition. I hope it isn't going to become chronic. I mean to check this growing tendency to insomnia before it goes any further than it's gone already. I shall give her a rousing strong dose this evening. Poor child, she's been suffering terribly of late from her spell of wakefulness."

Did he mean, by accident, to give her an overdose of morphia? Mohammad Ali wondered. No, no: impossible; too commonplace; too clumsy; that wasn't fine enough for Harry Chichele's subtle and acute intelligence. Such an accident as that would be culpably negligent. The physician who commits an error of equal magnitude in the case of his own wife, cuts his own throat, both professionally and socially. No doctor dare venture on such an attempt. Harry Chichele, meaning to get rid of Olwen in order to marry Seeta Mayne—for Mohammad Ali, driven to bay, fairly faced the problem in its full ugliness—would be scrupulously careful to avoid the very shadow of professional suspicion. He would steer clear of prescriptions and poisons. He would keep himself well beyond the reach, not only of law, but of scandal and gossip. He would allow no handle to shrugs and innuendoes and whispered hints. He would see that Seeta suffered no harm; that candour itself—the leering, sneering, shoulder-shrugging candour of our cruel cynical modern society—should never be able to mutter under its breath that the first Mrs. Chichele disappeared from the scene at a most convenient juncture in a most curious, questionable, and unsatisfactory manner. Mohammad Ali knew Harry Chichele well enough to know that though he was a villain he was no fool. He would not sacrifice Seeta as well as Olwen.

Yet the Indian could only fight Olwen's battle against the husband who he knew in his heart desired to get rid of her, by watching and waiting, not by open warfare. To speak to the police would have been worse than childish. He was driven by circumstances into ambush and stratagem. His instincts told him, and correctly told him, that Harry Chichele was planning foul play. But if he had imparted his suspicions to any one else in all England, they would only have laughed at him for a romantic idiot. What possible evidence had he to allege? None, none, absolutely none—save the intangible evidence of his own keen and rapid oriental intuitions. The imputation would have seemed to anyone but himself too monstrous to be ever taken into serious consideration. So his hands were tied. Recognizing the danger, he could yet do little or nothing to avert it. He could only watch, and wait, and scrutinize. As ever, he must stand by while the drama of life unfolded itself passively before his attentive eyes. Kismet, kismet; it was all fated. Always fate; that dreaded destiny. The devil's die had been cast long since. Would the devil win? Or Mohammad and Olwen?

Harry's eyes wandered along the shelves aimlessly. They fell at last upon the three watch-glasses that contained the germs he had brought back from his journey to the east-end the previous evening. A faint gleam of satisfaction lighted up his face as his glance rested upon them for half a second fitfully in passing. He toyed carelessly with the pipette in his trembling fingers. Then his gaze moved on as aimless as before. Mohammad Ali, keener even than his wont, noted, and jumped at the truth instinctively. An answering gleam flashed tiger-like and fierce from his jet-black and eager oriental eyes. He followed Harry with his gaze as a snake follows the movements of its destined victim. His cue was gained. He had the man fairly in his grasp now; and all the latent intensity of his Arab nature—implacable and remorseless in its righteous wrath—shone forth with awful and unmistakable clearness on every feature of his handsome countenance. Olwen was saved and Harry foiled. He would drive the man to bay! He would hold him in check! He would force his hand! He would show the criminal he was detected and overmastered!

But not openly! Not openly! For Olwen's sake, he would not drive Harry to sheer desperation. That would defeat Ali's own end. He would only prove to him by overt signs that he knew the truth, and that the truth was undeniable; and then he would leave the baffled wretch to his own guilty conscience, to make Olwen, if he could, as happy as anything could now make her. He didn't want to drag Harry to justice—that would break poor Olwen's tender heart. He didn't want to egg him on into suicide or flight—that would still cause her unnecessary anguish. He didn't want Olwen ever to learn the hideous truth—that would break her dream with a rude awakening, and reveal to her the utter baseness and cruelty of the man she still tried with feminine earnestness of purpose to love and to honour. He only wanted to let Harry see that he knew all, and that he could prove all to Seeta if he were so minded. That would give him a check, and a check on Harry was all Mohammad Ali wanted.

Lunch time came, and they both left the laboratory together. Harry went in to lunch with Olwen. Mohammad Ali declined his casual invitation; he preferred to go home, he said, to his own lodgings. He waited for a while till Harry had finally disappeared. Then, with stealthy steps he hurried back, when Harry was well gone, to the empty room. To such painful straits had the circumstances of very need reduced him. The intending criminal was taking all his steps in the frankest and most open fashion possible. The guardian of right and justice was compelled in turn to track him by mean and underhand means, and have recourse to depths of vulgar deception for the sake of countermining him.

Queen Anne's Road lies in a very retired part of Hampstead, backed up by a lane which gives entry to the yards and gardens in the rear; and the laboratory was built apart from the house, for purposes of safety, its windows abutting on this blind alley. It had at the side a small dark chamber, used for developing those particular germs which will not thrive under the influence of sunlight.

An honest man can do nothing by stealth without feeling guilty. Mohammad Ali felt guilty indeed as he crept back into the deserted laboratory, and went up to the three suspected watch-glasses. In breathless haste he boiled some water in a glass globe, and holding them above it, began to steam off the manuscript labels which Harry had written and pasted on their backs. It would have been shorter, of course, to wash them thoroughly, and to fill them up again with pure water ; but Mohammad Ali was afraid even so of the virus—a single germ left unkilld on the glass and floating in the water would suffice to communicate to Olwen any disease so infectious and virulent as these oriental epidemics. Besides, he wished to keep the morbid infusions themselves as evidence of Harry's evil intent, in case he found it needful to bring the charge home to him. So he took off the labels carefully with steam, gummed them on three new clean watch-glasses, filled these last to exactly the same height with distilled water, and replaced them once more on the experimental shelf. The dangerous infusions he removed to his own special table in the laboratory, where only he himself was every permitted to meddle, and numbered them afresh in his own handwriting. That done, he breathed freely at last. If Harry tried to poison Olwen now with germs of disease injected into her arm in place of morphia, he would only succeed in giving her, at worst, a little harmless dose of distilled water.

But Ali wanted to do something more than that : he wanted to nail Harry down to the deliberate attempt to poison his wife in a way which could leave no possible or recognizable trace behind. Running his eye over the bottles in the row opposite him, the Indian stopped short, abruptly, at last, at the one labelled in gold letters, "Santonin." "The very thing," he thought to himself, with a flash of intuition. "Injected under the skin, it brings on a temporary dimness of sight for a few hours, succeeded by a short fit of colour-blindness, and is otherwise harmless. If I put a few minims of that into the watch-glasses—and if Harry does as I think he means to do—Mrs. Chichele will complain to-morrow of the symptoms of santonin poisoning, and I shall be able to say to him, 'There I outwitted you.' " He took the bottle down, and dropped a drop or two of the harmless mixture into each watch-glass. Then, hastily and stealthily as he entered the room, he glided back again, and went off to lunch at his own lodgings.

Olwen was saved, and Harry outwitted !
At least, so Mohammad Ali reckoned.

But, as he shut the laboratory door behind him, Lizbeth, silent and stealthy as himself, stole out, with a cunning smile on her sharp small face, from the deep shadow of the dark chamber. Suspicious as ever, she had crept in there to watch Mohammad Ali with her keen, small eyes, through the crack of the door, as closely as Ali himself had watched Harry Chichele ; and now she was asking herself in her quaint knowing way what harm the Blackamoor could possibly have been brewing among them there bacteria. She felt quite certain he was up to no

good. A man who makes his entry noiselessly into an experimental laboratory, treading on tiptoe, who misplaces and ungums the authorized labels, puts everything back on the wrong shelf, and generally plays havoc with constituted arrangements, must clearly be bent upon some kind of mischief. *She* put put him up to it, Lizbeth didn't doubt. He was always for *her* and always again' *him*, the nasty warmint. What right had the Blackamoor, Lizbeth would like to know, to come skulkin' round there, mixin' and meddlin'? She'd teach the man to let folks' things alone! Serve him right if he was to get took with the germs hisself, for trying to muddle up people's eppidemmicks. But she'd seen what he'd done with every germ Jack of 'em, and she wasn't going to let Harry Chichele's interests fail for want of proper and efficient looking after.

With which reflections more or less consciously floating through her mind, Lizbeth lighted the gas-stove at her leisure once more, and proceeded to boil a second lot of distilled water in the glass globe, for her own wise and sufficient purposes.

Plot and counterplot; the London Arab against the Arab of the East. Lizbeth backed herself to outwit the Blackamoor.

At ten that night Harry Chichele went down to the laboratory alone, to fetch the pipette, he said, and some morphia for Olwen. Strange to say, however, he didn't fill the pipette from the ordinary morphia bottle; he filled it instead from an experimental watch-glass on his own special shelf, distinctly labelled in his own handwriting, "Suspected cholera germs: No. 1. Levantine sailor in lodging-house at Rotherhithe." Of that, three people were perfectly certain. All three could have taken their oath upon it. The first, was Harry Chichele himself, who was particularly careful to make quite sure about so awful and momentuous a crises of his life—and Seeta's. The second was Mohammad Ali, who, crouching against the window in the back yard by the blind alley, where he had crouched already in waiting for more than two hours, peered straight in round the edge of the blind upon Harry Chichele, the candle in his hand, and read with his keen oriental glance the very words of the false label on that harmless decoction of santolin and water which he himself had substituted for the deadly liquor. The third was Lizbeth, who lurked once more in the dark compartment, watched with keen and chuckling interest the gradual unfolding of this mysterious drama. She didn't know for her part what it all meant; but she knew it was a game of plot and counterplot between the doctor and the Blackamoor, and she had made up her mind to back the doctor, and to see the Blackamoor finally checkmated.

It was with a beating heart, two minutes later, that Harry went up to the drawing-room, pipette in hand, bared Olwen's arm, as usual, as far as the elbow, and pushing the instrument into a tiny wound in the delicate white skin, injecting its contents with a faint shudder into a minor artery. At the moment itself, remorse and horror almost held back his guilty hand; he knew himself for a vile and unnatural mur-

derer ; the room reeled and swam around him ; but for **very safety** he dared not now recoil. He pushed in the cylinder with trembling hands. The die once more was irrevocably cast. The devil had conquered. In intent, at least, Harry Chichele was a second time a murderer.

"It doesn't feel like morphia," Olwen murmured low. "I think it somehow stings a little."

Harry could scarcely command his voice to answer, "It's a new kind. It'll do you good, darling. It's a far more powerful drug than the one I've been giving you."

Perhaps the germs would fail to take. They often failed, he knew with rabbits. The moment the deed was done an awful revulsion came over him at once. He wasn't quite as wicked as he believed himself to be. Remorse and agony dried up his speech. Heaven grant the germs might never live. It was too terrible. Too ghastly and cruel. He shrank himself from the hideousness of the crime he had devised and attempted and perhaps carried out ! No, not carried out. Heaven grant the experiment might turn out a failure.

But Lizbeth, below, in the back scullery, was chuckling now to herself in grotesque delight at the thought how the Blackamoor had tried to outwit the doctor, and how she in turn had outwitted the Blackamoor.

The germs were back where the doctor had put them.

The doctor must be wanting to give 'em to somebody.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Across the Atlantic, men take these little episodes more lightly.

Eagle City on the Sunset Lode trail, where Ivan Royle found himself for the time being in comfortable quarters—for the far West—at the National Pacific Union Hotel, was a perfect type of those strange small settlements which spring up everywhere on the extreme frontier of American civilization as it advances westward. Eagle City owed its existence, of course, to what its handful of inhabitants euphemistically described as "the mining industry." Mining enough there was, no doubt, but of industry very little indeed to speak of. Eagle City consisted in fair proportion of three hotels, five gambling hells, eight saloons, one music hall, two shooting galleries, four pan-stores, and a Chinese laundry. Its one long street was composed entirely of scattered frame houses, fronting the road at every possible angle of incidence. Most of them were built in the sweet simplicity of the grocer's box style of architecture, with roughly-painted signs hanging out in front, to let the world know whether it might expect inside a gun-shop, a faro bank, a ten-pin alley, a saloon, or square meals at reasonable figures. Three years before Ivan Royle's recent arrival the site of Eagle City had been what its population loved to describe as "a howl-

ing wilderness." To Ivan Royle's gentle English soul the howling appeared really to begin just where the wilderness ceased to exist. For silver had been found in a neighbouring lode, and the silver had attracted to itself, in due course, its fair share of the squalid and sordid cosmopolitan Demases of modern society in their usual proportions.

Eagle City stood full in view of the glorious snow-white mountain peaks, still covered with their pall of virgin purity. Around it the forest stretched down to the sage desert; above it the eternal hills raised high to heaven their dazzling pinnacles of spotless splendour. Silence unbroken reigned everywhere about; but, in one short month, the silent waste was transformed as if by magic into the howling wilderness of nascent civilization. Cayotes gave place with startling rapidity to billiard-rooms and restaurants; the home of the rattlesnake yielded up its site for the lurid courts of the strange woman. A pioneer town of two hundred inhabitants, its gamblers and roughs of the wildest sort, prompted only by the greed of gain and bad whisky, made war upon each other there with loaded dice and loaded derringers. Into such a pandemonium of vice, folly, and the struggle for gold had Ivan Royle, the gentle, sweet-natured English artist, flying from the evil of his own heart, incongruously flung himself.

At a plain deal table in the principal saloon of that remote town, which advertised itself on its signboard with unblushing blackguardism, as the "Road to Ruin," Ivan Royle sat quietly sketching a few little bits of life and character for the series entrusted to him by his illustrated paper. At a larger table in the centre of the room, a motley collection of gamblers and miners was engaged in sipping bad lager beer, and dealing out some very old and dirty cards to one another for a game of poker. At the head, with the perennial smile of his nationality pervading his face, Li Sing, the Chinese laundryman, took his part with the rest in the excitement of the game, and listened, bland and smooth-faced as his wont, to the rippling stream of conversation. One of their number, Chaparral Bill, had just returned from a neighbouring city, and was busily retailing his light experiences there.

"And what did Monte Joe say to that now?" one of the listening miners inquired with much show of interest.

"Why, Monte Joe," his neighbour responded roundly, "he jest whips out his six-shooter, and sez, sez he, 'Westward the star of empire takes its way,' sez he, 'and civilization's march is ever straight onward toward the golden gateway of the setting sun. If you mean to say,' sez he, 'that Howling Jackass, as a place of residence, is fit to hold a coal-oil candle to Eagle City,' sez he, 'that's a question that can only be adequately settled with the usual instruments.' So he points his shooting-iron right at him, and covers the galoot before he could open his blamed mouth to stutter out an answer. You should ha' seen that critter make tracks down street! It was a sight to make a 'possum larf, I can tell you."

"And who was he?" the other inquired.

"Oh, he was jest a cowboy from down the trail, who came in on the high lonesome to paint the town red in the usual fashion; and Monte

Joe, he had a few words with the high-spirited cattle-king about a question of precedence; and the end of it all was, as the durned idiot was riding his pony down street ten minutes later, he tumbled off right thar, and died instantaneous, in a fit or suthin."

"Heart disease?" one of the bystanders suggested, ironically.

"Don't know whether you'd call it 'zactly heart disease," the speaker continued, draining off his lager; "but, so far as I observed the symptoms of his complaint, he was bleeding profusely from the right lung, and he seemed to have a small round hole 'bout the size of a deringer bullet drilled clean through him."

"And what did the boys say, Bill?"

"Oh, the boys jest held an informal inquest, right thar as the body lay, and returned a verdict, in case the United States marshal should happen to look round, 'Died of the effects of imprudently calling Colonel Joseph Jefferson Ridley a durned liar.'"

"Monte Joe is a law-abiding man, boys," Chaparral Bill continued pensively, with his hand on the lager pot; "but he thought that cowboy was in questionable taste, and he emphasized his opinion by judiciously planting a few bullets where he thought they would have a mollifying effect upon that mistaken fellow-crittur's misplaced enthusiasm. But he didn't cause no unnecessary pain, not Joe didn't. That cowboy dropped right off his pony like a pound o' lead, and never so much as knew what it was that hurt him."

While Bill was thus entertaining the assembled company with his improving conversation, and Ivan Royle was quietly sketching him from his table in the corner, Li Sing, the Chinaman, after the manner of his race, was engaged with stolid composure and unvarying smile in watching the pips upon the cards as they fell, and cheerfully paying or receiving the difference. Li Sing was in luck that afternoon; as the miners put it in their own vocabulary, the cards were panning out rich for the Chinaman; and at each deal he raked in his money and promptly pocketed it with a faint look of sly exultation obliquely beaming from the corners of his eyelids. "The Chinaman's struck it rich this time," one of the men muttered grumbling; "too much of a streak altogether for the Mongolian. The Chinaman must go; he's getting one too strong for us."

Li Sing smiled as imperturbably as ever, at this gentle remonstrance, the meaning of which he perfectly understood, and proceeded to deal out a fresh deal from the greasy pack he held in his fingers.

At that very moment one of the burly miners sitting opposite seized his hand roughly with a volley of hideous Western oaths, and exclaimed, in a tone of excitement, "The fellow's cheating; that's whar it is. He's a regular eighteen-carat desperado, I tell you. He can see every pip on all the cards as fast as he deals 'em. By thunder, boys, you look how he's doing you!"

As he spoke he pointed to a little pool of spilt lager on the table below, right in front of the unhappy Chinaman. Every eye was directed at once to the suspicious spot, as the friend of law and order, dealing out the cards from below one by one, proceeded to show how Li

Sing had managed to spy out every single pip of them. Sure enough, whether Li Sing knew it or not, the surface of the lager made a tiny mirror, in whose face the pips were distinctly reflected as he passed them over it. The Chinaman received the news of his exposure with characteristic calmness of external demeanor. He still continued to smile mechanically, but the corners of his mouth now twitched and quivered with tremulous anxiety. Innocent or guilty mattered but little :—with those lawless men, suspicion and condemnation were one and the same thing. The Chinaman had been caught red-handed in the very act—caught committing the highest crime and misdemeanour anywhere known to gambling humanity—cheating at poker. For such an offence there is but one punishment in the miners' code. Li Sing knew it, and trembled like a spaniel.

In a moment that group of rough and angry men had formed themselves with practised ease into a capital tribunal. Chaparral Bill took upon himself the office of foreman. "Boys," he said, "the prisoner before you is accused of playing off the square at poker. According to the principle of this community, playing off the square is punishable right off with twenty yards of stout hemp rope. What is your verdict on the prisoner at the bar? Do you find him guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty!" the irregular jury of miners unanimously responded.

"Hand us out a rope," Chaparral Bill observed laconically to the lounging barman.

The barman executed the order as promptly as if he had merely been asked for another pint of lager.

"Tie his arms," Chaparral Bill muttered sternly.

The men wound the rope round the unresisting Chinaman till his arms were pinioned flat to his sides, and the legs alone were left free for walking.

Chaparral Bill spoke again. "Let us do everything decently and in order," he said. "This is justice. The sentence of the court on the prisoner at the bar is that he be marched out of the city to the nearest tree, and there be hanged by the neck till dead, by the hand of every adult male in this community. Come along, boys; there's fun ahead. We're a-going to hang him."

Ivan Royle could contain himself no longer. At the risk of his life—for he knew how cheap that commodity was held among his present neighbours—he clapped his hand firmly upon Chaparral Bill's shoulder, and exclaimed in a voice full of horror and alarm, "You don't mean to say you're really going to hang him just for cheating at poker!"

Chaparral Bill turned around fiercely, and his fingers toyed in an ominous fashion with the trigger of his derringer. "Tenderfoots are advised to mind their own business in this here community," he said, with an angry and menacing aspect. "I've seen a tenderfoot booked through to the happy land afore this for far less than interfering with the righteous execution of a yellow-faced Chinaman. The law is supreme in Eagle City. The Chinaman's had a fair trial by a jury of his peers, and if we hang him, I reckon, stranger, we mean to hang him all square and above-board, like peaceable, law-abiding American

citizens. You ain't accustomed to justice in Europe. Tenderfoots and aliens are hereby respectfully warned off the premises."

Ivan's indignation waxed bright and earnest. But the more he expostulated, the more did those angry men turn in their savage humour against him. Their blood was up and they meant business. "See here, tenderfoot," Chaparral Bill exclaimed at last; "this thing's got to be done, one way or the other. The question is, Shall we just hang the Chinaman alone, or shall we make a job of it, and hang the pair of you for aiding and abetting? The law don't look with no favour in Eagle City on parties that take the side of prisoners convicted of trying to cheat at poker. If you want to save your own neck, you'd better give up the darned Chinaman's."

Ivan saw that resistance was useless. Horror-struck and silent, he followed the crowd as they marched the pinioned Chinaman between two sturdy miners off to the improvised place of execution.

Arrived at the tree, the hasty procession called a halt, and Chaparral Bill addressed the assembly, which by this time comprised almost every man, woman, and child in Eagle City. The news that an execution was to take place had spread like wildfire through saloons and gambling hells, and the entire community had turned out in a body, wild with excitement, to "see the Chinaman swung into eternity."

The burlesque of justice was enacted on all sides with singular gravity and pretended order.

"Boys," Chaparral Bill began, quietly, "we don't have no court, no judge, nor no United States marshal neither, here to protect us."

"Nor don't want 'em," a hoarse voice interposed in a stage aside from the tumultuous crowd. The rough bystanders, seized with the humour of it, laughed and applauded the unknown speaker.

"The United States Guv'ment don't give us no protection," Chaparral Bill continued, without deigning to heed the untimely interruption, "and we're consequently obliged to protect ourselves with our own hands by lynching our prisoners. This here prisoner, Li Sing, the laundryman, has cheated at poker, let alone his being no morn'n a blamed Chinaman to begin with. Some of the boys were ag'in law and order, and wanted to have us run him out and let 'em fire a shot at him for the sake of the amusement. But the peaceful and law-abiding citizens of this community, taking the matter into their own hands, have given the Chinaman a fair trial, and finding him a cheating gambler, and a bad crowd generally, have deputed me to act as sheriff at his execution. Boys, put a noose in that rope there, will you!"

The noose was made in profound silence.

"Pass it over the branch."

They passed it over.

The men had rolled out two empty biscuit barrels from the Eagle City grocery store. On top of the two they placed a plank of deal. Chaparral Bill assisted the Chinaman to mount the plank. Till that moment, Li Sing had not opened his mouth. But as he stood there facing his murderers, with his hands tied and the fatal noose placed round his neck, with the strange stolidity of the Mongolian race, he

called out in an almost unmoved tone, "Good-bye, Melican ; good-bye, tenderfoot. Tank you for try to save poor Chinaman."

A long rope was tied to the plank between the barrels on which the Chinaman stood. Chaparral Bill, in a tone of command, gave the word of order, "Every miner in this camp, and every citizen in Eagle City, bear a hand to the rope and take his share in the responsibility of checking the Chinaman through to his destination."

Every man laid his hand to the rope except Ivan. Chaparral Bill turned upon him angrily. "You want two executions, tenderfoot, do you?" he said, with intense contempt in his tone. "Boys, we ain't in the humour of argument. To prevent further trouble, which might lead to unpleasantness, jest lay hold of his hands, will you, and make him pull with you, whether he likes it or don't like it. And as he spoke he covered Ivan with the muzzle of his six-shooter.

The two nearest miners seized on the Englishman in spite of his struggles, and by sheer force made him lay his hands with theirs on the rope.

Chaparral Bill, in a loud voice, gave the word, "Pull!"

"Every hand obeyed the order. A jerk of the rope—the plank fell, and the Chinaman's neck was instantly broken.

In twenty minutes all Eagle City was back once more at its customary avocations, swearing and drinking and gambling and smoking as if nothing at all out of the common had happened. Only, now and again, in an interval between the deals, one reflective spirit would remark to another, with a pensive sigh, that, after all, it was confounded rough they should have been obliged to string up their only laundryman. No other notice was taken of the affair. It was an ordinary incident at Eagle City.

CHAPTER XXIX.

It was an awful night of suspense and misery to Harry Chichele. His sin was indeed beginning to find him out. All night long, through the blackness and silence, he lay and tossed on his feverish couch, between hope and fear, unable to whisper a word of his dread to Olwen, unable to hint or suggest his devouring terrors, afraid even to move lest he should betray his wakefulness, yet incapable of dozing for a single second, with that awful weight of guilt and uncertainty pressing every instant upon his agonized conscience. Hour after hour the big clock on the stairs tolled out the passing of the slow, slow ages—for they seemed like ages, immeasurable ages, to his burdened soul. As each passed by he could not believe the evidence of his senses, that it was all one single night. No year in his life had ever seemed to spread over such endless time. He had crammed an infinity of conflicting emotions into each second of that short space, and each second expanded accordingly for him to a whole eternity.

Would the germs take? That was the question. He feared they would. If so—he dared not face it! Now that he stood confronting that hideous scheme as an irrevocable reality, it appalled and horrified him by its baseness and cruelty: how could he ever have dreamt of such a vile crime against his own dear little innocent Olwen? Would the germs take? He feared they wouldn't. And then he would have seared his troubled conscience with that ghastly attempt, all for nothing; and he and Seeta would never, never be happy together. It was an awful alternative. He never knew which way to accept it.

Would the germs take! He hoped they would. He lay there, watching and waiting and expecting, looking forward for the first symptoms of that horrible disease, silently observing with his cool, keen, medical sense every momentary change in Olwen's breathing, every pulse and flutter of her palpitating heart, every conceivable sign of the coming fever. They *must* take; he felt sure they must. The poison was so fresh, so strong, so virulent. For Seeta's sake, he longed for the morning. He longed to know that that awful consummation was really coming.

Would the germs take? He hoped and fervently prayed they mightn't. Murder! murder! his own wife's murderer! Oh, God! oh, God! What an awful record! Dear little Olwen! Gentle little Olwen! A good wife and true to him, as ever lived. But circumstances, circumstances, irrepressible circumstances. He couldn't help it. Fate had compelled him. One first false step entails so many others. An error from the beginning, a fatal error. Fatal, indeed, in this its final outcome. How horrible to live in this fearful suspense! If only, now, he dared take her wrist and feel her pulse. These Oriental epidemics mature rapidly. Oh, God! her forehead was growing hot and dry. Pray heaven it wasn't so! But she laid her arms now outside the counterpane. What an awful vigil; What a night of agony! Two o'clock! Two o'clock only! One—two—why no more? Surely, surely, it was hours and hours since it last struck. Three more eternities, long, long eternities, before the day could break! Even daylight would be a little relief! to see how she looked; to hear what she said! Strange that till to-night she had always been so sleepless. And to-night, without morphia, without drugs of any sort, she slept so soundly, so sweetly, so placidly. But cases will take these strange twists and turns. Could it be the very strength of the disease itself that was making her sleep so deeply in spite of everything?

Lying there so motionless and unconscious still! He wouldn't disturb her or rouse her from her sleep for millions. He lay like a mouse, himself, the whole night through, though his soul was thus torturing him, tossing and turning. He would have given worlds if only he could have groaned or moaned. A little outlet for his pent-up feelings would be such a relief. But he must be quite motionless in spite of it all, and pretend to be sleeping. Truly, the way of transgressors is hard! Such agony he had never before conceived as possible. "Oh Seeta! Seeta!" he murmured to himself, "I have suffered much for you."

As he spoke, Olwen stirred and changed in her sleep the position of her arms. Her forehead, he could somehow feel without touching it, was dry and hot. He held his hand cautiously half an inch off. Her skin was often dry and hot on these latter nights. There might be no particular harm in that. Oh heavens! had Ali changed the infusions? He prayed in his soul with fervent wrestling that Ali might have changed those deadly infusions.

Harry Chichele was a very stout sinner; but he had miscalculated somewhat his own criminal proficiency. He thought himself quite superior to remorse. When he came to try, he found himself not entirely beneath it. Bad as he was, he was better than he imagined; he could still suffer agonies for the horrid crime he had tried to commit so cruelly and basely.

At five o'clock, Olwen awoke with a start. She put a hand to her forehead with a cry of pain. "Harry," she cried. "Oh, Harry, Harry! My head's aching! Aching terribly! I never felt such a headache before: and pain here—oh, so very, very very sudden!"

Harry knew it in a moment. They were the exact symptoms of the Levantine sailor!

Oh, God! oh God! It was too, too terrible!

That case proved fatal in twenty-six hours.

A sudden thrill run through his bones. A thrill so complex, so awful, so horrible, that he couldn't himself have said what it was. Relief, at the termination of that long suspense. Joy, at the arrival of an expected result. Horror, at the confirmation of his deadliest fears. Agony, at the sight of so much innocent suffering. Remorse, at the consciousness of his own unspeakable guilt. Triumph, at the sense of having after all, outwitted Ali. Shame and fear and pity and despair, at the knowledge of the heinousness of his attempted crime. And through it all, one fiercely overpowering and masterful thought—to save that beautiful menaced life at all hazards.

He sprang from the bed in a second like one possessed. He must cure her! He must cure her! Oh heavens! he must cure her! In its first stages the disease is curable. Olwen had told him of her deadly symptoms at the very earliest possible moment. He had no diagnosis to make, no traces to observe; he knew at once the full extent and nature of the mischief, and no living man in all England was better fitted than he to wrestle and cope with it. She should not die! She should not die! He should save her! He would save her! He must save her! His own beloved precious little Olwen!

He loved her still—oh God! how he loved her. If she died now, he would long for a hell in which to hide himself.

In ten minutes the whole household was alive with the alarming news that Mrs. Chichele had been taken seriously ill and that the professor had sent for another doctor to help him treat her. To his brother-practitioner, Harry's account of the matter was transparent truth and simplicity itself. He had been down in the east-end a couple of

days before, he said, investigating some suspected cases of cholera symptoms among Levantine sailors, Lascars, and so forth; and he must have brought home the infection in his clothes, for Mrs. Chichele now exhibited precisely the same distressing symptoms as his east-end subjects. He was agitated, of course, but not to the outer eye more painfully agitated than any man would naturally be under similar circumstances. His wife was seriously ill with a terrible complaint, and he himself, it might be fairly presumed, had unintentionally conveyed the contagion to her. That alone might make any man alarmed and horrified: and nobody was at all likely to suspect Harry Chichele of any deliberate or conscious design against his own wife's life and happiness.

But within, his soul was like a seething volcano. Horror and remorse had now taken hold of him bodily. The hell he prayed for was burning within him. The devil's die had been cast to no purpose; he longed at present with unspeakable and hopeless longing to take that inevitable throw back again. All his skill and care he lavished tenderly upon that poor helpless feverish patient, whom his own act had deliberately brought into such deadly and awful and undeserved peril. The sight of her suffering drove him mad with pity. To watch her there in throes for her life, and to know that he himself had with his own hands, of malice prepense, caused all that agony! Oh it was horrible! horrible! horrible! He could hardly nerve himself to wait upon her and tend her. Yet for his own punishment, and for Olwen's sake, he would go through with it now. He deserved it all, and ten thousand times more. He would not spare himself one pang of it all. No hand but his should nurse her through the crisis. He would brazen it out: he would watch it all through: for mercy's sake, he would steel himself to endure it.

Ten thousand times more than he had longed to rid himself of that sweet presence he longed now, with an infinite yearning, to save Olwen's life and make her happy.

Olwen! Olwen! Olwen! Olwen! That older chorus had once more reasserted itself. Seeta was forgotten and utterly banished from his mind. It was all Olwen, Olwen now. For mercy's sake, let him save Olwen!

Let him save Olwen, and then kill himself by her side for very shame! He wasn't fit to live with such an angel as Olwen. He could easily kill himself—it was his one chance of grace. He knew so many ways of doing it unobtrusively, so that Olwen herself would never suspect it. And Olwen then might at last be happy.

He owed it—he owed it as reparation to Olwen.

All that day he sat and watched by Olwen's bed. He never stirred or moved an inch. He was swallowed up now in one burning desire—to undo the past by saving Olwen.

To undo the past! To undo the past! The past can never, never be undone. And the future stretched black as hell before him.

To Lizbeth, below in the laboratory by herself, the news came not wholly unexpected, and yet as a strange and sudden revelation. She

understood at last what it all meant. The doctor had wanted to give *Her* the cholera! She understood it clearly and definitely now in her own small head; yet, with her dog-like fidelity and tenacity of affection, she was not in the least distressed or shocked at it. She accepted it as a dog accepts his master's doings against friend or enemy. He wanted to get rid of her, did he, really? And the Blackamoor, he tried to go and stop him! But she'd outwitted the Blackamoor, and set it all right! She'd helped the doctor to do as he wished. She'd deserved well of Harry Chichele.

For as soon as Mohammad Ali's back was turned, Lizbeth had made it her first business to ungun the labels on the suspicious watch-glasses, to replace them all on their proper infusions, and to put back the germs where Harry had left them. In a moment, now that it all came out, she understood that she had made herself an unwitting accessory to an attempted murder. Ali had suspected it and tried to prevent its occurrence, but she herself, with childish low London back-slum cunning, had baffled and outwitted the hateful Blackamoor. She was glad of it now. She'd helped the doctor.

More than that the girl saw clearly now. She knew that Ali had detected Harry, and had tried to change the infusions in the watch-glasses. But she had seen Ali, and Ali had never seen her in turn. She understood instinctively that this special knowledge gave her a powerful handle to use against the Blackamoor. If ever he dared to accuse the doctor of having attempted to poison his wife, she, Lizbeth, could come forward in opposition and give evidence against him, crushing evidence, that she had watched him meddling and muddling that afternoon with the infusions in the laboratory. And nobody could give similar evidence against herself. If ever it came to a question of swearing, it was Ali who would be hanged, and not Harry Chichele.

Mohammad Ali, at his own rooms, sat at breakfast moodily by himself, waiting and wondering as to Olwen's safety. The postman's knock resounded at the door. He never heeded it. The servant brought in a neat little note for him, in a small and dainty square envelope. On the flap, in delicate dark-brown letters, he noticed casually a stamped monogram, "S.M." or "M.S.," he knew not which, nor did he care greatly. He tore it open, and on the pretty correspondence card within he read in a bold and well-formed feminine hand these surprising words:—

"Langham Hotel, Thursday.

"DEAR DR. ALI,

"I have come to London, direct from Florence, at a moment's notice. I have come to throw myself upon your kind indulgence. I have come to crave your aid and assistance. I don't want to see Harry or Olwen. I have kept my compact, as you well know, though it has cost me hard; and I'm not going to break it. Urgent and serious private business has brought me to London. But I desire most earnestly that the dear Chicheles should not hear of my visit; and I'm afraid to call upon you at your own rooms, lest I should chance to

knock up against either one of them. Can you come and see me here privately at the Langham? I know you will—any time you choose to-morrow morning. I rely upon friendship.—In greatest haste,

“Ever yours most sincerely,

“SEETA MAYNE.”

Ali flung down the letter with a gesture of despair. Could Seeta possibly have chosen a worse time than this for coming to London?

If Harry saw her, all would be up. In his present mood, with such strong temptation visibly before his eyes, the pains of death itself would never restrain him. Seeta would reassert all her old power, and it would mean death for poor little Olwen.

He must rush down to the Langham and see her at once. But on the way he must call at the Chicheles' and inquire for Olwen.

CHAPTER XXX.

COLONEL MAYNE'S year of leave had well-nigh expired, and he had loitered almost to the last at Florence, where he had been spending the time with his distinguished sister in the congenial occupation of doing nothing. Colonel Mayne's feelings with regard to Seeta were singularly mixed and complex in character—he was half proud of her, half afraid of her; laughing now at her feminine vehemence, angry again at her unconventional freedom, cordially disliking all her views and opinions, but fully alive to the reflected glory which her fame and repute as a popular novelist cast by implication upon his own person.

At Florence, however, since there were no foxes to hunt, no tigers to shoot, no pheasants to massacre, and no Nautch girls to encourage, Arthur Mayne passed the time somehow by playing deep and playing constantly. A man, after all, must do something. The Tyrant time must be killed somehow. Arthur Mayne killed him at Florence in his favourite fashion by losing Seeta's spare cash at the club with magnificent freedom and gentlemanly indifference. There was plenty more where that came from, Arthur had speculated a little in mines himself, and burnt his fingers into the bargain, of course—burning his fingers was a pet amusement, indeed, of Arthur's; like the singed moth, he could never long keep away from the candle. But Seeta had an inexhaustible mine of her own in her own head—a mine that could be worked all the year round without intermission, yielding sixty ounces to the ton, pure gold, all ready crushed, and washed, and minted. On that mine, Arthur drew freely; and Seeta, petulant and angry often, yet worked the mine for his benefit at higher pressure than ever before, partly to meet Arthur's constant necessities, and partly to forget about Harry Chichele.

Now, it is a peculiarity of the spendthrift disposition that the more

you give it the poorer it gets. Arthur Mayne went on spending, went on gambling, went on losing Seeta's money, and wanted more to spend daily. Besides paying away all he could scrape, he paid away a great deal more on note of hand in perspective, "Mayne's paper," as everybody called it, grew a form of currency alarmingly frequent among all the English-speaking colony at Florence. Worse still, Mayne's paper was at a discount, too; nobody at last cared to receive it as payment in full at any card-table. This was annoying; this was disagreeable; this was even ignominious; for no gentleman likes to find his promise to pay regarded as less than the exact equivalent of hard money by his equals anywhere. Colonel Mayne in his despair applied once more to his agents in London. His agents in London wrote back politely by the next post informing him that they could make no further advances to his credit on any terms; and at the same time they casually mentioned that unless Colonel Mayne could meet in full certain acceptances now due to a certain respectable native capitalist at Saharanpur, in the North-West Provinces, the native capitalist's London solicitor had assured them of his intention to take immediate proceedings against the colonel on his return to town to report himself at the War Office. Return he must, for his regiment was now back in Europe, and within a few weeks he must resume command of it at Londonderry, where it was about to be stationed next in due rotation. This was bad news, indeed. Seeta's patience was well nigh exhausted; Seeta's purse and credit were very probably exhausted also. He would have to return to London almost immediately. An action just then would mean downright bankruptcy; bankruptcy would mean disgrace and professional ruin. Arthur Mayne stood fairly aghast. He found himself at last face to face with realities. Something must be arranged at all hazards.

Under these painful circumstances the gallant officer determined to do the thing he hated most, and make a clean breast of it all to Seeta. He would rather have gone into action unarmed than face the wrath of that righteously indignant woman. But Seeta received the news of the crash with that calm resignation with which women often accept financial ruin. "I've done all I can, for you, Arthur," she said quietly! "I can do no more. You'll have to go through the court now. We must return to London and face it together."

"Couldn't you do something," Colonel Mayne suggested, with a tentative shamefaced sidelong look at his sister, "with that—er—that native friend of yours, Dr. Mohammad Ali!"

"My confounded Baboo fellow," Seeta repeated calmly. "He's the son of *your* confounded banker fellow at Saharanpur, I remember you told me. You want me to use my influence with the Baboo to get him to use his influence with his father to put off a little longer this inevitable final smash and crash of yours! That's what you mean, in plain English! Arthur Mayne, I'm positively ashamed of you. How you can ask me to do such a thing as that after the way you've spoken to me of poor Mohammad Ali, who's worth a hundred and twenty thousand such fellows as you are, I'm only a woman, but I can't imagine."

"His valuation's gone up," the colonel responded, with quiet sar-

casm, trying to look as unconcerned as possible, and failing egregiously. "And I think you might say a word for me, and these niggers 'll do anything on earth, you know, for a white woman."

Seeta's eyes flashed unwonted fire as she answered proudly, "I wouldn't ask him a favour for myself, no, not if I died for it; and I won't ask him one even for you, I swear to you, Arthur. But if it's to save you from disgracing the family by going into the Bankruptcy Court, and exposing all your shabby underhanded dealings with professional gamblers and Indian money-lenders, I'll tell you what I'll do for you. I'll go to London with you—though I hoped never to go again while I lived to that hateful hole—and I'll call on Mohammad Ali, and I'll promise him faithfully—I keep my promises—that if he'll induce his father to grant a delay, I'll undertake personally to see him paid every penny in full—which is better security than ever you could give to anybody. I'll work my fingers to the bone to settle his account; I'll mortgage all my future writings and success for you. And then I know what you'll do for me after all—go away, and begin from the beginning over again as badly as ever. Pah! if I hadn't loved you dearly from a child, I'd hate you, Arthur—I'd hate you!—I'd hate you!"

Colonel Mayne had something of the Mayne pride left in him after all, and, if he dared, he would have resented this characteristic outburst of Seeta's. But he couldn't resent it now without losing her help, and her help was just then absolutely indispensable to him; so he put his pride in his pocket for the moment, and accepted with fervour the terms that Seeta offered to him.

As soon as Mohammad Ali had read the letter which Seeta sent him on her arrival in London he took up his hat and proceeded to action. He had flung Seeta's note on the floor in his first despair. He picked it up now and put it in his pocket. He then hurried around to Harry Chichele's to find out whether by some strange turn of fate anything untoward had happened to Olwen. He couldn't resist his vague instinct which told him that something terrible had occurred. Instead of the housemaid, Lizbeth herself opened the door for him. She had been lurking in waiting for the Blackamoor's approach for hours before, that she might herself see and gloat over his discomfiture. Not that Lizbeth was cruel or unfeeling, far from it; she was one of those peculiar and restricted natures which can only fix themselves upon one end at a time, and can see nothing in any light save the light of their own narrow and specialized sympathies. Lizbeth could have fawned upon Harry Chichele even though he kicked her, but she could only regard Mohammad Ali as Harry's baffled and defeated enemy, whom she herself had succeeded in baffling and defeating.

She didn't wait to let him enter; that might have done her out of her expected triumph. She took him into the little study down stairs, and kept him waiting there for twenty minutes. He didn't know till afterwards how fatal those twenty minutes were. He asked for Olwen. "She's all right," the girl answered quickly, and then went away.

Relieved at the answer, Mohammad Ali waited patiently; no doubt Harry would soon come down to him. At last the door opened once more, and Lizbeth reappeared. She wagged her head at him with malicious delight, and whispered mysteriously in a solemn undertone, "I said she was all right; that ain't true. She's ill; awful ill. She's took with the cholera. The doctor's up there attending on her now, and he's sent for another doctor to 'elp him."

Mohammad Ali shrank back aghast. "Ill!" he cried, in an agonized voice. "Mrs. Chichele ill! Taken with the cholera! It isn't true! It can't be true! Why didn't you tell me of this at once? Somebody—somebody must have been meddling with the infusions."

"Somebody *was* a-meddlin'," Lizbeth repeated stoutly, looking up in his face with a triumphant smile. "And I'll tell you who. *You* was the somebody. I was watching behind and found you out. I seen you do it. That was why I didn't tell you. You want the p'lice to you, that's what *you* want. You've been a-tryin' to murder 'er."

Without stopping to think of the strange peril that thus unexpectedly confronted him, Mohammad Ali, stunned by the sudden news, rushed up the stairs and into the open drawing-room. Harry stood there in momentary consultation with his brother-doctor. As Mohammad Ali entered the room, Harry's face grew deadlier pale than ever. It was terrible thus to be confronted with the man who knew all, who had guessed all, who had read everything in his features beforehand. Terrible at any time, but more painfully terrible than ever at this awful hour of suspense and remorse and fruitless repentance. He did not dare even to look at Ali. He stood and trembled through every limb as Ali fixed his stern eye upon his downcast face. The Indian motioned the strange practitioner silently from the room. The stranger went out, and closed the door behind him. "What does this mean, Chichele?" Ali asked in a terrible voice. "What devilry have we here? What have you done? What other murder have you been planning now?"

Harry raised his eyes full in front and met his accuser's without flinching. There was in them no hate, no anger, no terror even—nothing but unspeakable horror and agony. "We must save her, Ali!" he cried, in a voice wild with anguish. "At all hazards, we must save her, we must save her! Hang me for it afterwards—hang me for it if you like—but first let us save her! For God's sake, help me, help me to save her!"

Mohammad Ali eyed him again. He knew his man by heart now, down to the very core and root of him. He saw that Harry was speaking the truth. "Save her!" he echoed. "I will let you save her. If you save her life, you shall go unhung. Take that for pardon. I will give you one more chance to save her!"

Harry looked at him once more with an agonized look, full of genuine heartfelt horror and remorse. "Ali," he cried, clasping his pale hands hard together, "I won't pretend to mistake your suspicions. I know what you think, and I know what you accuse me of. Never mind that. Hereafter, perhaps, we may settle that question. But for the present at least, until I have saved her life, say not a word about it to any one

for her sake, I implore you. Hang me, if you like ; but keep it from her. If Olwen knew, it would kill her—it would kill her ! ”

“ If Olwen knew,” Mohammad Ali echoed, for the first time in his life allowing her Christian name alone to pass his lips, “ it would certainly kill her. For her sake, at present at least, I promise to keep my own counsel.”

“ Thank you,” Harry cried, in a fervour of gratitude. “ And when we have saved her, I shall take my own way, if need be, of ridding her of me. I can easily do it.”

Mohammad Ali nodded. It was a strange compact, but to his oriental notions not an unholy one. “ That is all you can do now,” he answered coldly. Kismet : it was fated. “ Harry Chichele, you are the devil’s son, and you have acted on his throw as your father bid you. I would never poison that pure and beautiful woman’s life by unmasking before her all the unspeakable and unthinkable villainy of the man whom she took for her wedded husband. Let her still believe you good and true to her. Go back to her now. Go back and save her. Do your best to undo the evil you have done. Nurse her, tend her, watch over her carefully. I see even *your* hard conscience is touched at last. I can trust her to you. I have other business myself elsewhere. I must go at once. You incarnate devil, keep to your compact ; keep to it strictly, as you dread exposure.”

He bowed a cold and stately oriental bow, and glided noiselessly from that polluted presence. He had, indeed, as he said, other business to perform. He saw the new danger that loomed before them. Seeta Mayne was now in London. If Harry at this juncture should meet Seeta, Mohammad Ali himself would not answer for what fresh devilry the sight of that woman, for whose sake he would have murdered his own true wife, might not now suggest to him.

At all hazards, Harry must not see Seeta—must not know that Seeta was anywhere in London.

He started at once, hailed a hansom, and drove in hot haste down to the Langham. At the door, the porter glanced casually at his card. “ Miss Mayne’s gone out, sir,” he said respectfully ; “ but she expected you was coming, and she left a message for you. Colonel Mayne, he’s upstairs, and he’ll see you immediately. Will you walk up to the drawing-room, and find him ? ”

Alarmed and surprised at Seeta’s absence, Mohammad Ali ran hurriedly upstairs. In the drawing-room he found the Colonel, fuming, though most unusually and unaccountably polite. “ I particularly begged my sister not to go, Dr. Ali,” he said, with forced cordiality—it was necessary now to conciliate the Baboo—“ as she’d made a most definite appointment here with you, and as I knew her business was of great importance ; but she received a telegram just half an hour ago about your friend Mrs. Chichele, and she rushed off at a moment’s notice, in hot haste, begging me to stop and make her excuses to you. You’ve heard that Mrs. Chichele’s seriously ill, of course ? Ah, yes, I thought so. You must have missed Seeta on the road. She took a hansom to Queen Anne’s Road the very minute she got the telegram.”

"Might I see it?" Ali answered with an inward groan, too desperate to think of minor rules of etiquette.

"Certainly," the colonel said, pushing the flimsy bit of Government paper across the table towards him. "There it is. Make what you can of it."

Mohammad Ali took it up, and read, "Mrs. Chichele took seriously ill. Come at once.—ELIZABETH WILCOX."

A horrible light burst in upon his soul. He saw it at once. It was a deliberate conspiracy.

"The little fiend!" he muttered to himself angrily. How on earth did she come to know Miss Mayne's address? How on earth did she come to know she was in London? Surely, surely, after all she said, Miss Mayne can't have written to Harry Chichele! In this world, whom can one trust? And then, with a sudden flash of thought, he put his hand into his right pocket. Yes, yes, his suspicion was indeed correct. Seeta's note was no longer there. He understood it all now. He must have pulled it out with his handkerchief when he wiped his forehead upon Chichele's doorstep. That little wretch must have picked it up, read, and pondered it, and, knowing that Seeta was Harry's friend, telegraphed for her on purpose to countermine him and to defeat Olwen. That was why she kept him waiting in the study. Her cunning had been too much even for the Blackamoor. She had lost all! She had done for Olwen!

CHAPTER XXXI.

MOHAMMAD Ali did not wait to listen to Colonel Mayne's reiterated apologies for his sister's absence. He rushed downstairs once more (the colonel following, profusely polite), took another hansom, and drove as hard as the horse could carry him to Queen Anne's Road, where he arrived at last, trembling and excited, in a fever of anxiety for Olwen's safety.

It was Lizbeth once more who opened the door to him. "She's 'ere," the girl said, with a triumphant grin on her sharp face, which at once recalled the worst expression of her father, the periwinkle merchant. "I knowed she'd 'urry. She come a few minutes after you left, Mr. Blackamoor."

Mohammad Ali hardly cared to inquire "Who?" for conventional decency's sake; but he asked it mechanically, nevertheless, from pure force of habit.

"Why, 'er," Lizbeth answered. "The tall 'un, the 'ansome 'un; Miss Mayne, they calls 'er. She's upstairs now, along of 'im in the drawing-room."

He walked upstairs once more to the bedroom flight, as though he had now acquired by circumstances the right to do so. "How is she

now?" he asked the maid whom he met at the door. "Very bad, sir," the girl answered, with tears in her eyes, "but they hope they'll save her."

"Where's Miss Mayne?"

"In with Mrs. Chichele."

"Tell Dr. Chichele I wish to speak to him below in the drawing-room."

The girl went in and told her master.

A minute later Harry came down, pale and haggard, his bloodless hands toying anxiously one over the other, and his white face distorted and seamed with nervous twitching.

Mohammad Ali glanced at him sternly. He saw the man was moved to his very marrow. But the pitilessness of Ali's Arab nature stood him in good stead now. He would shrink from nothing. He would punish the sinner to the uttermost farthing. He would make him drink the cup of shame and remorse to the very dregs. He would let him taste the bitterness of death. The pit that he digged, he himself should fall therein.

Harry stood opposite and looked at him imploringly in silence for a moment. "Hast thou found me, oh my enemy!" he cried at last in profound anguish.

"It is not I who have found you," Mohammad Ali answered, with grave scorn in every accent of his voice. "It is your own conscience—for you *have* a conscience, though you thought you hadn't any. Your own conscience has stung and goaded you. But I, too, have tracked you down. I have dogged you and watched you, as a cat does a mouse, from the very beginning. I knew that you murdered the woman Wilcox. I knew that you meant to murder your own wife. I tried to prevent it, but by somebody else's inexplicable villainy I failed—I failed. And now I shall watch and wait in your house here, without your leave, till the end comes. If Mrs. Chichele recovers, as God grant she may, you shall keep your compact, and go to your own place in disgrace and dishonour. If Mrs. Chichele ——" his voice faltered and almost choked him—"if Mrs. Chichele does *not* recover, you shall pay the penalty of your horrid crime—where you ought to pay it—as a felon, on the gallows."

Harry's hands fumbled nervously with his watch-chain. "Surely the bitterness of death is past," he murmured at last. "The game is up. I must die anyhow. Better death than scenes like this. But Ali, Ali, I will try to save her. I am trying my best to save her now. Seeta's upstairs with her. She came this morning. I suppose that was your doing, too. You sent her here to-day to torment me further."

A light burst in at once upon Ali's mind. He had dreaded Seeta's coming all for nothing. He had looked at it wholly from a wrong point of view. It was really an aggravation of Harry's anguish. He saw the finger of destiny in this—the finger of the strange impersonal Nemesis which dogs the steps of crime everywhere, according to his ingrained Oriental belief, and runs it to earth at last with implacable vengeance. Seeta's presence was agony to Harry at such a crisis. It

merely distracted his soul with varying desires. There they lay and sat face to face together in the sick-room upstairs—the woman whom he had basely tried to murder, and the woman for whose sake he had tried to murder her! Even if Seeta had not been there, Harry Chichele's punishment would have been harder than he could bear. Seeta's arrival at this awful moment made it all the more tragic and insupportable for him. It brought into more poignant relief than ever the contrast between his wicked hopes and their terrible realization. It was fate that tormented him, the fate he himself had so madly courted.

And it was Lizbeth, not he, who had brought this further torture upon the hunted criminal! Lizbeth who had done it in her blind and cruel desire to serve him; Lizbeth who had put into the enemy's hands this last powerful engine to be turned against the man she worshipped and fawned upon! Kismet, kismet. Allah is great, and his ways are inscrutable. Mohammad Ali bowed down before this last stroke in awful reverence.

"No," he answered slowly, with solemn deliberateness, "it was *not* my doing. It was *not* I who sent Miss Mayne here this morning. It was the decree of heaven. Your own crime works out in due course its appointed punishment. The girl whose mother you murdered, and whom you then took into your own house, in order that Allah, in the fullness of his own fit time should use her as an unwilling instrument against you—it was she who telegraphed to Miss Mayne to come. It was she who told her of Mrs. Chichele's illness. It was she who gave us this fresh hold over you. I, your enemy, who have tracked you and hunted you down so long, I would never have thought of it. I would have missed the clue. I went to Miss Mayne's hotel to-day to prevent her, if possible, from coming near your house. But Providence wisely overruled my design. She has come here entirely of her own free will. She has come here to punish you for your ghastly crime. And it was your own satellite and willing slave who brought her here to torment you with her presence."

Harry raised his eyes and looked at him once more, trembling violently from head to foot. "Have mercy upon me," he cried. "Ali, Ali, have mercy, have mercy."

"You deserve no mercy," Ali answered curtly. "You have shown none to her, and you shall receive none from me. You Christians should be merciful, it is your creed; but we of Islam profess nothing but the sternest justice."

"Harry's face grew livid with terror. "Then you mean——" he cried.

"What?" Ali asked, with pitiless precision.

"To tell all—to tell your suspicions—to her—to Seeta?"

Ali eyed him with cold disdain. "My suspicions!" he said, "What do you mean, if you please, by my suspicions? I have no suspicions. I have knowledge; certain knowledge. I know you did it. I'm sure you did it. With my own eyes I saw you do it."

"That's a lie," Harry hissed out between his clenched teeth. "You know it's a lie, a cursed lie. You can't prove it, Mohammad Ali,

Don't drive me too far. Don't drive me to recklessness. You've driven me to despair and madness already. If you drive me too far you'll repent it yourself. You love Olwen. I know it. I've seen it. If you drive me too far——" He paused, and glared at him.

"That will do," Mohammad Ali answered calmly, with one hand upon the table. "We need no further explanation, we two. A lie is useless when the two men alone concerned know it to be a lie. If Mrs. Chichele lives, you shall eat your words. If Mrs. Chichele does not recover, you shall hang for it, I promise you. You have driven me to the verge of madness with your crime, and you will find me a hard enemy to reckon with. He who eats the devil's bread must pay at last the devil's penalty. But, meanwhile, I give you one hope, one chance. As long as Mrs. Chichele lives—for her sake, not yours—I will never breathe a word of all this to Miss Mayne, or to any one."

"Mohammad Ali," Harry Chichele said with trembling lips, "it is war between us now—open war. If it were not for those two women upstairs, I would choke you as you sit there with that lie in your throat. What I did, and whether I did it or not, no man knows. You take me cruelly, at a mean advantage, when my wife lies dying, perhaps, upstairs; and you hurl against me these deadly accusations, which you know to be false, or inferential only, at a moment when it's impossible for me reply to them. For the present, I leave you. If Olwen recovers, as God grant she may"—he said it earnestly—"you and I will settle this question otherwise."

"Go," Ali answered, raising his head, and flinging the words at him across the table with utter contempt in voice and gesture. "You only add one more lie to the tale of your crimes. Go and attend upon the woman you have tried to murder. I know you tried. With my own eyes I saw you do it."

CHAPTER XXXII.

HARRY bowed in silent acquiescence, and went up again to Olwen—and Seeta. It was no time to bandy words now. He was utterly crushed. The worst had come, for the present, at least, and till the worst was over, he had no thought or care for his own safety; his one idea was to save Olwen. At all hazards he must save Olwen.

For Seeta's sake he had imperilled her life. For Seeta's sake, now, he must save Olwen. For, as Mohammad Ali had rightly said, he thought now most of all of Seeta.

That either of those two women who loved him should learn the full tale of his vile baseness was to Harry Chichele ten thousand times worse than death itself. Your educated and cultivated criminal, indeed, can die easy enough, when it comes to dying; how simple a thing to face death with honour, or even death without disgrace. But exposure, contempt, dethronement, dishonour, the unfolding before the eyes of

those you love of all your inmost treachery and wickedness—what man of culture can stand unmoved in face of that awful, that unspeakable prospect? What man of feeling, however depraved, can fail to shrink with unutterable awe and horror and sickening fear from that last and ghastliest punishment of his sin? Not certainly Harry Chichele. His heart stood still within him at the thought of such terrible and utterly irretrievable disgrace. He dare not face it. It was too, too horrible.

He must save Olwen! He must save Olwen! No matter for the present about Mohammad Ali's hinted suspicions. If Olwen recovered! Olwen must recover! And yet—— He glanced across timidly at Seeta. Oh, great heavens! in that case his dream was gone—vanished for ever! He and Seeta could never be happy together!

A fresh revulsion of feeling had come over him now. He no longer felt a prey to devouring conscience. The tides of passion that swept through his soul in swift ebb and flow that awful day kept fitfully changing with each rapid change of varying circumstance. The sight of Seeta had stirred up the latent devil in his blood afresh. He forgot his remorse; he forgot his agony; he forgot Olwen; he forgot everything save his wild desire to call Seeta his own—his own for ever.

The devil had gained his point now. Whatever part of him conscience possessed was overruled and outmastered by that wicked passion. For Seeta's sake he could face anything. For Seeta's sake he could murder Olwen.

He approached the bedside where Seeta sat watching the sufferer's eyes. "How is she now?" he asked, with intense interest.

"Worse, I fear," Seeta whispered back softly in his ear. The dreaded answer filled his soul for a moment with a vague, yet horribly fiendish delight. Let Mohammad Ali dare and do his worst! Suppose she died? What then? What then? The Indian was powerless. How on earth could he have been frightened by such foolish threats? Who on earth would believe such a cock and bull story as this of Ali's? He, an eminent scientific authority, a respected member of a learned profession, a well-known teacher at a London college, to attempt to use his technical knowledge for committing an unprovoked and cruel attack upon his own wife, the woman of his choice, with whom he had always lived on the most affectionate terms, and whom he could have no possible reason on earth to get rid of. It was too silly! It was too preposterous!

Seeta laid her hand upon Olwen's brow. "Very hot," she whispered, "very hot indeed." Harry drew back her hand with a sudden start. A new terror forced itself upon him at the word. "Don't touch her," he cried; "Seeta, don't touch her. Suppose—suppose you were to catch the infection!"

For himself and for others he had never once dreamt of it. Doctors are accustomed to make so light of contagion! But for Seeta, for Seeta, oh, horrible, horrible, horrible thought! *That* would be the most fearful Nemesis of all! Suppose that in his anxiety to get rid of Olwen he had given the cholera instead to Seeta!

The idea seized hold of him with ghastly vividness. In an instant

his fancy had conjured up another and to him still more awful picture—Olwen recovered and Seeta dead! himself left face to face with the woman he had tried to murder, with the full knowledge that in the attempt he had caused the death of that other woman for whose sake he had tried to murder her! And Mohammad Ali, taciturn and triumphant, watching him through all that lifelong punishment, and gloating in silence over his defeat and shame! Oh, horror! What a terrible doom it is to have inherited at once the cruelty and wickedness of the most depraved natures and the sensitiveness to pain of the highest and best! Harry Chichele had inherited both. He was strong enough to sin, but, like Cain, he found the penalty of his sin greater than he could bear. He bowed himself down and felt his heart fail within him.

"I came here to nurse her," Seeta answered low, in her soft quiet feminine voice, "and I shall nurse her through with it, infection or not, till I've seen the end of it. I'm not afraid of the cholera, Harry. I'm never afraid now. I'm afraid of nothing." And she stooped down and kissed poor Olwen's forehead with womanly tenderness.

Olwen clasped the white hand tight in hers. "I love you, Seeta," she said, half inaudibly. "Where's Harry, Harry?"

Harry took out his watch and looked at it. It was just twelve o'clock when Seeta kissed her. He noted the time. It marked an epoch. Oh, God! Oh, God! What a fearful epoch.

All day long they watched her eagerly. The pendulum of his feelings had swung round now once more, and Harry seemed to note Olwen's symptoms eagerly. Mohammad Ali hung about the house, and waited for news with smouldering anxiety. They brought it down from time to time. Olwen was ill, terribly ill. The doctor expected the crisis to come about nine or ten in the evening.

At nine or ten then, their fate would be decided—Olwen's, Harry Chichele's, Mohammad Ali's, and Seeta's. The lives and happiness of every one of them hung for the moment upon that single thread. What turn would the dreaded disease take? Would Olwen die? Would Olwen recover? Mohammad Ali, walking up and down in the drawing-room by himself, reflected with grim oriental resignation that it was all fated, all arranged already. They could do nothing to interfere with the irresistible course of divine events. Kismet, kismet. He left it to Allah.

Harry Chichele, upstairs, left it to the devil.

How slow, how slow the hours wore away! How long to wait for that expected crisis! Harry, with his eyes fixed now on Seeta, now on Olwen, consumed his soul with suspense and agony. Two terrible thoughts alternated for ever in his distracted mind. Would Olwen die! Would Seeta sicken? On those two thoughts he lived entirely. They formed the sole current and thread of his being.

He didn't know which he wished himself. Misery and remorse had now driven him wild. His thoughts whirled madly through his whirling brain. He was only sure of one thing in the world, that everything

on earth had gone utterly wrong with him. His deep-laid schemes had crumbled to pieces before his very eyes. His success itself appalled and alarmed him. Ali had outwitted him. Lizbeth had betrayed him. If Seeta suspected, him, if Olwen learned the whole disastrous truth, he would die dishonoured, disgraced, and unpitied. His brow was burning like fire now. He could hardly wait to see the crisis arrive. He felt as if he dare not live to face it. Oh, what a relief if he could only blow his brains out. He would have gone down to the study and taken his revolver out of its box to see if the lock was in good order, only that he was afraid of meeting Ali. He couldn't meet Ali. He dared not face that accusing enemy. The shame and degradation would have been too much for him.

At five o'clock he heard the front door shut quietly. He looked out of the bedroom window, and saw Ali slipping away to his own rooms for a cup of tea, the first thing that had passed his lips since morning. Harry turned and gazed hard at Seeta. "Watch her!" he said in a low undertone. "I'm going down-stairs for a few minutes. I'm not wanted. She seems easier now." And he, too, stooped down and hurriedly kissed her.

He was afraid for Seeta, but not for himself. No doctor ever catches the cholera.

He went down to the study, and, opening the drawer, took the bright clean revolver out of its case. Then he turned it over and examined it carefully. It was all in perfect order, he found; and cartridges to match in the drawer in abundance. He held it, unloaded, to the side of his head, and drew the trigger just to see how it acted. Yes, yes, he could hold it quite neatly and firmly in that position. The deadliest spot—certain and immediate. If the worst should come to the worst, at last—if Olwen died and Ali blabbed on him—if Seeta believed it and began to distrust him—if all went wrong to the top of its bent—he would blow Seeta's brains out in the room where she sat, and blow his own out afterwards to accompany her. That would be a fitting end for him and her; tragic, at least, without disgrace and shame and humiliation. Their drama would have come to a proper close. And then he went upstairs once more to Olwen.

As soon as he was gone, Lizbeth, watching ever eagerly and stealthily, stole into the room, and took the box, revolver and all, into her own bedroom. She had seen him through the keyhole hold it to his head. Whatever came, he should never do that. She hid it securely in a safe place. Lizbeth took care the revolver should not be forthcoming when Harry wanted it.

As the evening grew deeper, Harry's excitement became every moment more intense and unrestrained. He was anxiously looking out for the crisis to come. By nine or ten he would know at last whether or not he was Olwen's murderer. Olwen's murderer! The very phrase had grown familiar now. He looked at his watch every ten minutes. The hours wore by even slower than they had worn through that long last night. He could never have believed that a single day could embrace so many distinct eternities.

The slowest hours wear by at last. At nine o'clock the attack was at its worst. Unless it mended, collapse must set in. The crisis in these cases was always short and sharp and certain. Harry could see it drawing on now. It was here! It was here! The supreme moment had actually come. A few minutes now would fairly decide it.

They stood and watched, Seeta and he and the brother-doctor, for ten minutes together, with profound anxiety. The suspense was such as none of them had ever known before. Then Olwen opened her eyes dimly a moment. "I'm going," she said. "Good-bye. Harry."

A fierce temptest swept at the word through Harry Chichele's wearied soul. He knelt down by her bed, and seized her hand fervently in his. "Olwen," he cried, covering it with kisses, "my Olwen, my Olwen! You mustn't! You mustn't! You'll kill me! You'll kill me! Come back, my darling! Oh, for heaven's sake, don't say so, Olwen!"

The other doctor motioned him gently away. "Air," he whispered. "Plenty of fresh air. It's her one chance. Stand away there, all of you. Let her have plenty of room, for heaven's sake. Dr. Ali, give me that bottle please, will you?"

Mohammad Ali handed it to him without a word. For the first time then Harry saw that his enemy had glided noiselessly into the room, unable any longer to conceal his anxiety, and was standing like night at his wife's bed beside him.

He could have choked the black man at that moment with his hands for daring to intrude upon him at such a crisis.

"Hush," the other doctor whispered once more. "She's moving again! She's better! She's better! Quiet, quiet. It's passing off. There's no collapse. She's easier now. She's coming round. We shall save her. We shall save her!"

One unanimous cry burst forth in unison from all three of their lips—Seeta's, Mohammad Ali's, and Harry Chichele's. "Thank God!" they cried in a single breath, and each of the three cried it fervently.

As the night wore on, Olwen's condition gradually improved. The disease, indeed, is always startling in the rapidity of its transitions. It comes and goes like a thief in the night. As soon as the crisis is once fairly over, things begin to mend, and to mend rapidly. By two in the morning she was decidedly better, and Seeta, leaning over the bed, observed her face growing every moment more and more natural in hue and expression.

Still, Harry kept looking anxiously at his watch. As half-past two approached, his anxiety became once more intense. He held his eyes fixed so firmly on Seeta that Seeta at last began to wonder what he could mean by it.

"Are you waiting for anything?" she asked at length, turning towards him inquiringly.

Harry's lips quivered with a violent effort at self-repression. "Yes," he faltered out, in a tremulous voice, "I'm waiting for the crisis."

"For the crisis?" Seeta cried in an eager undertone. "Is there still a crisis? I thought it was past. You don't mean to say there's another, then, still to come, is there?"

"Not for her, my child," Harry answered hoarsely. "Not for her. Not for her; she's all safe now. Not for Olwen. But for yourself, Seeta."

His face was pitiful to behold as he said it, so profound were the marks of anguish and terror depicted upon it. "Seeta looked up at him with a start of surprise. "Why, what do you mean, Harry?" she asked, astonished. "Why should you think any harm would come to me?"

"It was twelve when you kissed her," Harry answered with an effort. "In fourteen hours and a half that virus matures. I've seen it do so in two cases already. If you pass three o'clock without adverse symptoms, all will be well with you. If not, heaven help us! it's all up with us."

Seeta's cheek paled slightly, but she answered nothing. She merely turned to Olwen once more, stooped tenderly over the bed where she lay quite still, and kissed her twice again on her white forehead. She did it on purpose. What had she to fear from death if it came? Life to her was of little worth now. She would gladly give it up in nursing Olwen. That would at least be some little expiation, and Seeta felt that expiation was indeed needed even for her. She did not know how infinitely more it was needed for Harry.

Harry moved restlessly in his chair each minute. He could stand this horrible suspense no longer. He must take something to keep up his nerve. He went downstairs to the dining-room for brandy. On the steps he surprised Lizbeth, half awake and half asleep, sitting by herself upon the mat by the drawing-room door. Lizbeth followed him like a dog down the stairs, and entered the dining-room after him mysteriously.

"What do you want?" Harry asked, turning round upon her sharply with the decanter in his hand.

"I want to speak with you about the Blackamoor," Lizbeth answered in a confidential tone.

"The Blackamoor!" Harry cried with a sudden burst of interest. "Dr. Mohammad Ali! Why, what on earth have you got to say about him at such a time as this, Lizbeth?"

"Enough to 'ang 'im," Lizbeth replied with grim delight.

Harry started. What on earth could this mean? "Enough to hang him," he repeated, incredulously. "I don't understand you."

"It was 'im as done it," Lizbeth went on, in a soft undertone. "I seen 'im myself. I seen 'im do it."

"Do what?" Harry asked, with increasing hope.

"Muddle up the germs as you put in the laboritory. When you was gone, 'e went meddlin' an' muddlin' with 'em, an' puttin' things where you 'adn't put 'em, and mixin' up the cholera and the morphia bottles, any 'ow."

A gleam of hope came across Harry's mind. "You saw him do it?" he cried eagerly.

"Yes, I saw 'im do it. I was 'id in the dark room, an' 'e came back,

after you was gone, a-stealin' in, all soft on 'is tip-toes, like them Black-amoores does"—and Lizbeth imitated Mohammad Ali to the life—"an' 'e took the glasses, an' ungummed the labels with bilin' water, an' put 'em all on the wrong things and mixed 'em up with morphia an' stuff; an' it's my belief"—here Lizbeth's eyes gleamed horribly—"that 'e did it just a-purpose to murder her."

Harry's eyes gleamed back in response. Begum Johanna's tiger-like glare came out in them at once with a fierce light. "You can swear to this?" he asked, with savage joy.

"I can take my Bible oath to it in a court of justice," Lizbeth answered, thrilling inwardly; "if I was to drop down dead this minit before you, I swear I could swear to it."

A fresh hope rose buoyant once more in Harry's mind. If only he had known this six hours earlier—before the crisis! He had Mohammad Ali in his power now! Plot and counterplot! Mine and counter-mine! Lizbeth was still too much for the Blackamoor! He questioned her closely in every detail, but she stuck to her story throughout with perfect confidence. He was sure it was true. Ali had tried to mix up his infusions. She must have caught the infection, after all, by accident.

He was not a murderer! He was not a murderer! It was all a mistake! It was all accident!

On his way upstairs again, he opened the drawing-room door quietly. The gas was alight, and Mohammad Ali was pacing up and down the room with clasped hands, waiting still for the latest news of Olwen. He started as Harry opened the door; but his anxiety made him ask for news, even from her guilty husband. "How is she now?" he inquired eagerly.

Harry, too, started in turn. He was asking himself just then whether Seeta had taken the disease, and forgot for the moment all about Olwen. "Better," he said, recovering himself slowly. "But that is not what I came to speak about. Mohammad Ali, I know now why you bandy about accusations of murder. I know now why you feel so deeply interested in this case. You fear for your own cursed black skin. It was you yourself who mixed up the cholera germs with the morphia. You stole back after I left the laboratory, and mixed them together, stealthily and murderously. Lizbeth saw you. She was in the dark room. And, if Olwen dies, she can give positive evidence against you. You are found out. If Olwen dies, you shall stand your trial, yourself, for murder!"

The words had scarcely escaped his lips when the black man sprang at him with a terrible spring, as fierce and lithe and sudden as a tiger's. Before Harry Chichele knew what to expect, Mohammad Ali was clutching him wildly with his angry hands, holding his neck hard with strong sinewy black fingers, and cramming that vile and hideous lie down his perjured throat with unutterable contempt and scorn and loathing. "Liar!" he cried. "Liar and murderer! If you think you can frighten me with your empty threats, you mistake your man! I care no more for them than I care for the wretched poisonous little

fiend from whom you took them. I defy her slander. I defy you both. I defy you and depise you. Now, go once more. I give you your life till Olwen recovers. Do your best. She must recover. But if harm comes to her, I swear to you by the Holy Stone of Mecca, you shall feel my fingers at your throat a second time, and then they shall choke your cursed windpipe till the breath's out of your murderous body. I let you off for the time being. You've failed again. You're foiled and baffled. Go, and give in. The Fates are against you."

Harry Chichele was a powerful man, but terror and remorse and conscience had unnerved him. He hardly knew what ailed him himself. He let the Indian take his fingers from his throat, and unhand him quietly. He felt in his heart that Ali spoke the truth. Cowed and broken, he crept upstairs miserably once more. This last flicker had died out in vain. As he went, the clock on the stairs struck three. He trembled as he heard. It was the critical hour to decide whether Seeta had or had not caught the infection.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

As Harry re-entered the sick room, Seeta was bending, still vigilant, over the bed where Olwen lay, now sleeping feverishly in the first faint flush of convalescence. He glanced at Seeta with infinite anxiety and concern in his sunken eyes. Seeta looked up, and for one second their glances met. Her face was worn and somewhat pale with nursing. The day's anxiety had told upon her visibly, Harry drew near and whispered in her ear with profound eagerness, "Do you feel anything? Have you noticed any throbbing or singing in your ears? Are you quite yourself still to-night? You don't recognize any doubtful symptoms, do you?"

Seeta gazed back at him fearlessly with her open smile; it had never even occurred to her to watch herself. She could afford to smile now, since Olwen was mending. "Never felt better in my life," she answered with proud unconcern and a look that recalled her old self. "A little worn and tired with nursing, of course; that's all, You needn't be in the least afraid of my taking it. I never take anything. I wish to heaven I could. Those who value life least have always the surest hold of it, I fancy."

Harry gazed hard at her, half incredulous still. His fear and terror were so great and urgent that he couldn't believe Seeta's own report of her perfect health. He fancied she *must* be going to catch the infection. That would be so like nature. She had kissed Olwen. A kiss was enough. The awful dream of that dramatic revenge had taken complete hold of his body, soul, and spirit. He couldn't shake it off. It would have been so absolute and ideal a Nemesis of his crime if, in

trying to murder Olwen for Seeta's sake, he had only succeeded in murdering Seeta !

"Let me feel your pulse," he cried impetuously. "It can't be all right ! You *must* be ill. Let me try your heart ! Let me put my hand one moment on your forehead !"

Seeta held out her fair white hand to him frankly and calmly, without a moment's reluctance. He clasped the slender wrist between his finger and thumb, and taking his watch mechanically from his pocket, out of pure force of habit, began counting the beats with methodical accuracy. Yes, yes ; she was right. Her pulse was in every way normal and natural. He dropped her arm with a sigh of relief, and laid his hand gently on her high forehead—that smooth pale forehead which was always Seeta Mayne's greatest title to artistic beauty. As he did so, Seeta started, and shuddered involuntarily. "Why, Harry," she cried, in a sharp tone of sudden alarm, "your hands are hot—hot and dry, and harsh like fever. Try your own pulse instead of mine. I never felt anything so burning hot in my life before as you are. You *must* be ill. You *must* be ill yourself. Why, what's the matter ? Are you faint ? Are you faint ? Don't look like that ! Don't stare so hard ! You seem to be giving way ! Dr. Ali ! Dr. Ali ! Come here and look at him !"

Harry sank back exhausted on the bed. A horrible singing deafened his ears ; strange feelings came and went within him. His heart throbbed and leaped wildly. The truth burst upon him in a sudden revelation. "I am," he muttered. "I never thought of that. The Nemesis has come in another shape. It's taken me myself. Cholera ! Cholera !"

It was quite true. The unexpected was the one thing that really happened. In all his profound calculations of chances, Harry Chichele had never calculated upon that obvious possibility—he had never reflected, in his blind confidence, that he himself might prove his own chief victim. He had treated the germs throughout exactly as though he possessed some magic talisman, some personal immunity from their dreaded attacks. He had pooch-pooched the notion of their ever in any way affecting or hurting him. He had plotted against Olwen, he had trembled for Seeta ; but on his own score, not a passing qualm or twinge of doubt had for one stray moment so much as occurred to him.

He thought of himself as absolutely secure ; and now, as Mohammad Ali had unconsciously predicted, the pit that he digged, himself had fallen into.

He recognized them at once, those terrible, deadly, undeniable symptoms, the very symptoms he had observed in the Levantine sailor whom he saw at Rotherhithe, and from whose infected body he had taken the germs of that horrible pestilence that was now devouring his own tortured vitals. His plot was turned by chance against himself. He didn't for a moment hesitate or doubt. He knew it was cholera, Asiatic cholera, in the milder form then sporadically prevalent among the foreign sailors in the east-end slums ; but a fearful, a loathsome,

and a deadly disease for all that. He knew he was doomed ; he was sure he was doomed, and he asked nothing better from the deadly little imps whose dances and gyrations he knew so well than that they should make short work of him as they did of the sailor, and put him soon out of his lingering misery. He didn't wish to live. He had lived too long, too long already. He wished only to sleep, and to forget it all—his feverish, futile, wicked, wasted, unholy existence.

One comfort alone he had, even so : a wicked comfort, a fitting comfort for such a man's last day on earth. He didn't think even then of his wife ; he thought — Seeta Mayne would be with him when he died to-morrow. Thank heaven for that. Or, if not heaven, then, thank the devil for that one crowning act of grace in this awful end of a terrible life devoted in secret to his deadly service. ●

As he cried aloud those two fatal words, "Cholera, cholera !" Seeta Mayne moved to the head of the stairs with her queenly tread, tearless still, but profoundly stirred, and called aloud once more in a firm voice, "Dr. Ali ! Dr. Ali !"

In the drawing-room below, Mohammad Ali was slowly recovering his equanimity after his exciting struggle with the pestilence-stricken murderer. At Seeta's call he mounted the stairs hastily, and entered the sick room. Seeta, speechless with terror, but still erect and stately and statuesque as of old, waved her hand demonstratively in Harry's direction. The Indian, glancing across at him, unmoved, took in the scene at a single look. Without uttering a word, he approached the bed, raised the stricken man like a child in his arms, and carried him, a limp and half-senseless burden, into the adjoining bedroom. There he laid him down with womanly gentleness on the small iron bedstead, his professional feeling once more reasserting itself, and whispered in a low voice to Seeta, "Send at once for another doctor. I can't attend him. I mustn't attend him. His is a very serious case indeed. He won't pull through. There's no hope. I can see the finger of death upon him visibly already."

Seeta rang the bell in silence for the servants. One of them came and sat with Harry while Mohammad Ali took his hat in haste and went out in search of the nearest medical man to attend him. By the time Ali returned Harry Chichele was seriously ill. It was a bad case ; it had run too far ; the virus had taken hold of its victim with terrible effect. His nervous energy and the excitement of the day had enabled him to hold up against the enemy much too long. He had used up his powers in mental exhaustion. When the collapse came it was utter and horrible. He sank at once into a kind of drowsy lethargy.

By Harry's bedside there sat one watcher who watched more closely and more carefully than any of them. As soon as Lizbeth heard the doctor was ill, she crept up silently to the room where they had laid him, and, kneeling on the floor at the head of the bed, kept her eyes fixed with rigid immobility upon his white face and clammy forehead. She noted every quiver of his lips and eyelids ; she followed every turn of his restless eyes : she anticipated every movement of his clutching

fingers. She, too, knew in her own soul that the doctor was doomed ; she saw with eyes of practiced skill those imps of germs devouring him bodily ; and with an angry heart towards Mohammad Ali, she thought of it all in some vague dim illogical way as the Blackamoor's doing.

In reality, she had done it every bit herself. She had aided and abetted Harry Chichele in his vile attempt to murder his wife ; the attempt was frustrated, but it bore its fruit ; and she, too, was paying her penalty.

Morning came, and Olwen was better. She woke with a start from her fitful sleep. Seeta sat still on the chair beside her. "Where's Harry?" Olwen cried, looking around her anxiously with staring eyes. Seeta put her off with some passing excuse. It was awkward and clumsy, but it served its turn. Olwen accepted it. Her head fell back wearily upon the pillow once more, and she waited with patience for Harry's coming.

As the day went on, however, Harry grew steadily worse and worse. The enemy had full possession of all his posts. Mohammad Ali, creeping to the door, beckoned to Seeta to speak with him outside a second. "Don't say a word to Olwen," he whispered anxiously—he called her Olwen straight out, now, in the excitement of the moment, without even remembering what a liberty he was taking. "It's all up with him. He can't recover. He'll die before night. He's sinking rapidly."

Seeta steadied herself by the back of a chair, like one stunned and wholly disabled. The message was worse than a message of death to her. She felt the ground reel and whirl beneath her failing feet. It was very wicked of her, but she loved him, she loved him. She would have staggered and fallen if she had not supported herself by the aid of the chair. "Let me go and see him," she cried piteously. "Oh, Mohammad Ali, you know it all ! When he's at the point of death, there can surely be no harm, no sin, no wrong, in my going to see him !"

Mohammad Ali, observing her emotion overpower her with its force, felt for her profoundly. He could never have had the heart to tell her for what sort of a man it was that that visible thrill passed through her frame. "Come," he said, taking her hand in his like a child's, "come in and see him. He wants to see you. He has asked for you twice. You can say good-bye to him—say good-bye for yourself and Olwen."

Seeta rose from the chair into which she had slowly sunk, and followed him blindly into the next room. Her heart was full and like to break. Her life had missed what life has best to give. She had loved but one man truly in all her days, and from that one man, as he himself had said, first, marriage had divided her, and now death would in turn divide her. She walked as in a dream up to Harry's bedside. Earth swam and blinked all round. He opened his eyes and saw her dimly standing there. "Seeta !" he cried. "Oh, thank you, thank you ! I wanted to see you. I am going at last. Good-bye, for ever. Good-bye, Seeta !"

Seeta bent forward over him and kissed him hard on his hot fore-

head. "For Olwen," she said, or rather moaned, with blinded eyes and choked utterance.

Harry pressed her hand feebly in his. "Now, once for yourself," he murmured eagerly.

In Seeta's mind those fatal words rose clear and distinct as reality once more—those words which, though she knew it not, had sent him to his doom—"Never, never; while Olwen lives you shall never touch them." She drew back her lips, and her heart throbbed violently. Dare she unsay it? But he was dying now, it was all so different! For a second she hesitated; then, with a sudden impulse a womanly impulse, she stooped again and printed one burning kiss upon his burning brow. "For myself, Harry," she said in a low voice, and reeled back half fainting.

Never before and never again did Seeta Mayne kiss any man.

Mohammad Ali led her back, unstrung, to Olwen's room, where that proud, beautiful, unbending woman sat long and cried silently. The day passed away and evening came on. At seven the servant brought her up a cup of tea to the sick room. She drank it without a word, and looked at Olwen.

Poor Olwen, too, was perturbed and terrified. All day, in her intervals of consciousness, she had grown more and more anxious at Harry's absence, and, as evening approached, she could no longer be appeased, but kept clamorously demanding him every two minutes, so that Seeta feared any further excuses must prove worse than futile. Seeta dared not tell her the whole truth; and she dared not leave her any longer in entire ignorance. What could she do? She had grown so feeble that for the first time in her life she felt the need of a man to lean upon. She left Olwen for a moment by herself, and moved downstairs to consult Mohammad Ali. Seeta's movements were always majestic; in this deepest and profoundest trouble of her life she moved like a goddess dethroned through the passages and corridors.

Ali was not in the drawing-room, and she stopped awhile to speak with the other doctor. She was gone only five or six minutes in all, but during that time Olwen's impatience had become absolutely insupportable. She must and would know all about Harry. Where could he be? Not, surely, at college! The frightened girl raised herself in the bed, and gazed about the room to look for Harry. He was nowhere to be seen. "Harry," she cried, "Harry, Harry!" No answer came. She was alone, alone. She looked once more. Could Harry be ill? The idea took undisputed possession of her, heart and soul. Where had they put him? She must look for Harry. She must find Harry. She must go to Harry.

Harry was ill, and nobody to nurse him! Why had they not told her? Why had they not called her? She must go to him at once. It was her place, her duty. She could stand no delay. Harry ill! and she away from him!

Half delirious still, and faint with illness, she dragged herself up with feeble arms and sat for a second vacantly on the edge of the bed. Her knees trembled and sank beneath her but she thought she could

walk ; she was better now ; she would move a little ; she would go to see what was wrong with Harry. She rose, and tottered, groping her way across the room. Her limbs were hardly strong enough to bear her weight, yet she staggered somehow, with uncertain steps, as far as the door. It stood ajar. Some one was talking on the landing below. She thought it was the housemaid conversing with cook. "How's Dr. Chichele now?" the cook asked, anxiously—the servants were always so fond of Harry! Dear, dear Harry! And the housemaid answered, in a voice that rang through Olwen's inmost soul, "He can't live long. He's awful bad now. It's took him at last in the collapse, they call it."

Oh, heavens, heavens, how terrible! How terrible! Harry ill, and no one had told her.

Then the worst was true! Harry was dying! Olwen needed to hear no more. With convulsive energy she staggered on to the next room. Harry would be put in there, no doubt. That was his own dressing-room. She held on tight to the door-handle for support, and tried to open it. The door was locked or bolted, she fancied. It wouldn't turn. She knelt down or sank upon the floor, and listened at the keyhole. The floorcloth was cold to her poor bare feet. She could hear Harry's voice, borne towards her like a dream, speaking distinctly—clearly and distinctly. Then he wasn't dead yet. He wasn't dying. He could still speak! He was speaking strongly and boldly, and sharply, too. So strong a voice was not like a dying man's! She plucked up hope once more, and listened at the keyhole with eager anxiety.

For a while the words came to her as in a trance, vaguely. She heard them without understanding them or guessing their import, though they came to her distinct and piercing as ever. Mohamnad Ali and her husband were talking together—they were talking about her—about her and Seeta. At times she caught her own name—Olwen, Olwen—quite clearly, she was sure. But what it was all about she hardly knew. The house seemed to whirl around her in a wild and giddy vortex of sights and sounds. A hideous phantasmagoria filled her brain. She only knew it was Harry's voice, and that Harry was talking of her ; poor, poor Harry!

She was glad it was of her that Harry was talking!

By-and-by, a sentence or two fell upon her ear, in spite of her delirium, with more definite meaning. She could catch the words, and guess what they were driving at. She had no strength to move, or cry, or stand, but she listened eagerly. Sentence after sentence came home to her now. She understood it all—all—every word of it.

They were talking of her! Of her, and of Seeta!

At last, she could stand the suspense no longer. She *must* find out what it was all about. She tried once more, with all her feeble strength, to turn the handle. Thank heaven, it moved. It yielded easily. The door was not really locked after all ; it had merely caught a little on the edge of the bolt. She opened it softly, and glided, bare-foot, with her noiseless tread, in to Harry's bedside.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MEANWHILE, within, in the adjoining bedroom, Harry had been growing steadily weaker and worse for some hours. Collapse had set in : he had been sinking gradually. The disease was now running its hideous course with frightful rapidity. But just towards the end he improved somewhat, as often happens, in a dying flicker. Sense and thought and speech returned to him for a while—returned fitfully, with incredible vigour ; and then, with a final feverish effort, he used up all his remaining powers in one last rally of spendthrift vehemence. He talked and looked like a strong man again. The terrible force of an accusing conscience was goading him forward now with all its awful energy to say what he must to Mohammad Ali. He knew he was doomed. He knew he must die. He knew it was the recoil of his own vile and incredible crime. But no womanish terror seized him for himself. He was utterly absorbed in the consciousness of his guilt. He thought only of the wrong he had done, the terrible wrong he had done to Olwen.

Lizbeth knelt still at the head of Harry Chichele's bed, and the neighbouring doctor tended him unceasingly. But as the force of that gnawing repentance grew stronger and stronger at length within him, he cried out in his agony for Mohammad Ali. A few hours earlier Ali had seemed his bitterest foe ; now Harry felt he must see him and explain to him ; he must ask his pardon, he must implore his help, he must beg his silence, he must confide in his discretion. Ali had always been Olwen's friend. To save Olwen pain, to save Seeta misery, he must talk with Ali, he must bargain with Ali, he must buy over Ali's final assistance.

Weak men are vindictive to the last. Strong men know when they are beaten. Harry Chichele gave in as a brave general gives in to his victorious enemy ; he yielded up his sword without one passing pang of feeble resistance. Fate was too strong for him, and he submitted manfully to its inevitable mastery.

Mohammad Ali came up and stood by the bedside, still stern and resolute, but melted somewhat by the evident signs of Harry's profound remorse and agitation. With his dusky hand he motioned the doctor silently from the room, and signed with a nod to Lizbeth to follow him. But when Lizbeth rose and cast a mute appealing look at her master, as who should say, " Must I really go ? " Harry answered from the bed, " Let her stay ! Let her stay. She can help to clear this matter all up. She knows as much about it as you and I do."

Mohammad Ali set a chair by the bed, seated himself there, and prepared to listen to whatever Harry might have to say to him.

The dying man began with a burning throat. " Ali, as soon as I'm

gone—and I'm going soon—Olwen must marry Ivan Royle. That alone can put me fairly out of her memory. He's better fitted for her than ever I was. See that she marries him. She would love him. And he loves her. She must take him, she must take him. It's the one thing possible."

"Ali bowed his head in solemn acquiescence. "She shall," he said, "if ever we can make her forget the man you are not and never were, without revealing the whole terrible truth to her."

"You will never do that?" Harry cried in agony, raising himself on his elbows as he spoke. "You will never tell her you think I tried to poison her!"

"I will never do that. Never. Never. It would be too cruel. It would simply kill her."

Harry paused, and moistened his parched lips with his dry furred tongue. "Nor to Seeta either," he said at last, with timid shrinking, as if he hardly dared to pronounce her name—the name of Olwen's unconscious rival.

"Nor to Seeta either," Mohammad Ali echoed. "Miss Mayne is not so true and noble a woman as your own wife; but she is far too true and too noble a woman ever to be told the full story of your awful wickedness. She shall never hear it."

Harry drew a long breath. "If they two never learn," he answered after a brief pause, "it is best as it is. I am quite content. I want to die. I can die less miserable."

"It is best as it is," Mohammad Ali replied solemnly. "While your wife lives—that pure good woman whose whole existence you have embittered and ruined by your poisonous love—I could never have given you up to earthly justice. But a higher court has removed the matter happily out of my hands. She will be saved, and you will be taken from her. You have your punishment; you die for your crime; and others will suffer less in the end than they might otherwise perhaps have suffered. For their sake, I consent to conspire with you in keeping this matter a profound secret. Mrs. Chichele need never know anything, except that her husband died, as everybody will say, a martyr to science. She will still believe in you; she will still be proud of you; she will still respect you; she will love you dead better than she could ever have loved you living. For, sooner or later, she must have found you out; and no one could ever know you as you really are without hating and despising you. You may take that consolation with you to the grave. It is all you have. In your endeavour to make yourself guiltily happy, you have covered with misery, and almost covered with endless shame, the two women who, each in her way, most truly loved you."

Harry covered his face, horror-smitten, with his hands, and answered nothing to the accusing black man. But Lizbeth, rising from the head of the bed, her whole face flushed and crimson with rage, confronted him fiercely like an angry tigress with unflinching wrath and indignation. "How dare you?" she cried, glaring at him with wild eyes. "How dare you speak so to 'im? How dare you attack 'im on 'is dyin'?"

bed? If 'e was well, 'e'd make your black skin smart for it as you deserve, you liar. Who says 'e done it? Who says 'e tried to kill 'er. It wasn't 'im. It was me! It was me as done it! An' I ain't ashamed of it! I changed the glasses. I poisoned 'er with the germs. It's me as is the true murderer. So there, Blackamoor!"

She spoke with a concentrated scorn and hatred in her voice that fairly astonished both her hearers by its profound intensity and depth of feeling. Harry was the first to break the silence of surprise that ensued for a moment. "You did it, Lizbeth!" he cried incredulously. "No, no, you didn't. You make some mistake. You don't mean to deceive, but you deceive yourself. This is a time to tell the whole truth. There's something to clear up. What did you do? Before I lie, tell me, tell me!"

"Yes, there's something to clear up on all sides," Mohammad Ali said as quietly as his conflict of emotion would allow him. "Harry Chichele, before you die in your sin, confess the truth; tell us everything just as it happened. Don't go to the grave with a lie upon your lips. This is your last chance to speak; speak now, and save the innocent from suspicion. You lied to me below; don't lie to me still. But first listen to what I have to say. When you had left the laboratory that day, after arranging the infusions, I went back to the room by myself—Lizbeth here saw me, it seems from the dark chamber—I removed the labels you had put on the watch-glasses; I gummed them on to a fresh set; and I filled the glasses with the labels on the back with santonin and water. I wanted to baffle you and to hold you in check. I wanted to save your wife from you. There, so far as I know, the matter rests. I thought there was nothing deadlier in the glasses than santonin. Later in the evening, as I watched and lay hid at the laboratory window, I saw you come down with a candle in your hand, and fill the pipette from the very glass that I myself had just before placed there. How it ever came to contain cholera germs I don't know and can't imagine. So far as my own knowledge extends, Mrs. Chichele may have caught the infection independently."

Harry drew another long breath. Could this be so? Could he have carried the infection on his clothes alone? Perhaps, after all, he had tried to no purpose. Perhaps he was less near being a murderer than he himself had at first fancied. If only he could believe that and Lizbeth's story it would be some small comfort. Accident would have relieved him of part of his guilt. He would have died merely a victim to his scientific research, not to his own vile and murderous intentions.

But Lizbeth rudely broke that last dream. "She didn't," the girl cried, starting up like a dog, with fiendish exultation in her voice and eyes. "You'er wrong. She didn't. It was me as done it! Me as poisoned her! Me as watched you! Me as changed 'em! Me as got the better of you all round! I'd back myself agen a Blackamoor any day o' the week. I was 'idin' in the dark chamber. I saw you a med-dlin' with the doctor's germs, an' as soon as you was gone, I up an' I changed 'em all back again, the same as they was afore ever you touched 'em. I done it because I knowed what the doctor wanted 'em

for. I knowed 'e wanted to get rid of that woman. I wanted to 'el, 'im. An' I'd do it again, just to spite you, Blackamoor. If I could, I'd put 'em in your own dinner! I would, you black devil you! An' I wish they'd killed 'er—that I do, so as the doctor could 'ave married the tall 'un. Oh, yes, I knowed what it was all about. You don't hide nothink from me, I tell you, I knowed it exactly. An' I'd say so if I was to die with the cholera myself this instant minnit. An' I wish I may, now the doctor's goin'. An' what's more, I'm goin' to, I'm goin, to."

Harry groaned a terrible groan. "Ali, Ali," he cried, "there's fate here again. You would have saved me from myself, and this child prevented you. The devil has held the dice all through. Our curse has worked its own way out. I'm dying! I'm dying!"

"Before you die," Ali cried solemnly, "confess it all. Tell us what we know. Take back the lie you told me downstairs. Don't go unfor-given. Do you confess it? Do you admit that you tried to poison Mrs. Chichele?"

"I tried to poison her," Harry answered, looking him in the face with a dazed look, as the spasm seized him. "I tried to poison her. I did it deliberately. I gave her cholera germs instead of morphia."

"And you did it because?"

Harry groaned again. "Will you drag it all out of me, word for word," he cried, in an agony of shame and remorse. "Oh, Ali, you're pitiless! you're cruel! you're merciless! You shall have it, then. I did it, because I wanted to marry Seeta!"

As he spoke a terrible cry pierced the air beside them—the long, loud, agonized cry of an utterly heart-broken and mangled creature. It was such a jarring grating sound as none of them had ever heard in their lives before. It shot through their ears like a thrill of pain. They turned to look. Olwen Chichele, in her white night-gown, and with her white face pale as death, stood rigid and immovable as a statue before them. Her hands were clasped tight one over the other, and her eyes were open, big and dilated, but they saw nothing. She gazed straight in front of her with a blank stare, fixed on infinity, and seemed as if rooted to the ground where she stood, in the first full horror of that ghastly revelation.

Harry looked at her, flung up his arms, cried with an answering cry like her own, and dropped as an animal drops when shot, on to the bed behind him.

She knew it all. She had heard it all. She drank it all in, in its unutterable hideousness. The secret they were just conspiring to keep from her, she had learnt of herself—irrevocably, damningly. Intent upon listening to what Harry had to say, the others had never noticed the faint rustle of her bed-gown against the door outside; they had never heard her softly turn the handle; they had never observed her gliding like a ghost into her husband's room. And now they stood face to face with the very worst. Olwen knew it—knew it all; and every thing was lost for every one of them.

For a second she stood a statue of flesh. Then she staggered and

fell. Mohammad Ali, darting forward, caught her, tottering, in his strong arms, and lifted her back tenderly into her own bedroom. There, he laid her once more at full length on her bed, cold and stiff, and called for Seeta. The shock had sent her back into delirium once more. She did not rave, but she knew nothing. Mohammad Ali had but one prayer—that she might never awake to realize her husband's shame; that she might dream away life, there as she lay, in happy insensibility.

Seeta and he composed her in her bed with tender care. He did not tell Seeta anything that had happened, except that Olwen had got out of bed in a delirious fit and gone into Harry's room, to find him dying. That alone would have been amply sufficient to account for her condition. Why disclose the rest? Why make one more woman needlessly wretched? Seeta had enough to bear of her own as it was. Guilty though she might be in her lesser degree, he would not willingly increase the weight of her lonely burden.

As soon as he was able he went back in haste to Harry's room. There, Lizbeth was hanging over the bed, crying bitterly. Great sobs convulsed her prostrate form. Her two arms were clasped in anguish above her unkempt head, which lay between them buried deep in the bed-clothes. Harry's neck had fallen back listlessly upon the pillow, pallid and rigid as a block of marble. Mohammad Ali held his hand reverently before the half open lips. No breath was issuing forth from mouth or nostrils. Not a hair stirred. He was stone dead. He had died at once with the sudden shock of Olwen's recognition.

The girl lifted her face from the clothes for a moment and met the Indian's eyes angrily. Her cheeks were deadly pale now. "You shall 'ang for it!" she cried with a vehement outburst, and relapsed once more into silent sobbing.

Mohammad Ali took her by the hand and tried to lift her from the dead man's bed. She resisted as a dog might resist the attempt to drag it away from its dead master's body. Strange! Her hand was very hot and feverish. Mohammad Ali looked her hard in the face. Dark rings surrounded her swollen eyes; the pupils were small and contracted vertically. A faint odour breathed from her body. He recognized those deadly symptoms at a glance. He knew what it meant. She, too, had fallen a victim to her own fearful stratagem.

"My girl," he said, with no trace of unkindness or cruelty in his voice, "you are ill yourself—seriously ill. You must go to bed. Come with me immediately."

"I shan't," the girl cried, with passionate resolution. "I shall die 'ere. 'E was kind to mother. 'E was kind to me! I shall never leave 'im—never while I live. None of 'em ever cared for 'im one bit like me. It was me as killed 'im, and I shall die beside 'im."

The curse had wrought itself out all round. Harry was dead. Lizbeth was dying. As for Seeta and Olwen, heaven help them, heaven help them!

CHAPTER XXXV.

ALL London rang next morning with the startling news that a famous doctor and a great authority on zymotic diseases had fallen a victim to his scientific ardour, and that a form of enteric disorder, very closely resembling Asiatic cholera was actually among us. Alarmists enjoyed a perfect carnival of terrorism. Flaring posters assured the public of the disquieting fact at every newsagent's. Printer's ink was lavished like water. People gathered together in little knots in the crowded streets and discussed the probability of what Harry Chichele would himself placidly have described as a good, swingeing, sweeping epidemic. The air was all alive for awhile with conflicting rumors. "The Cholera in London" became a nine days' wonder. It floated, lambent, on the breeze of heaven. Twenty Levantine sailors had died, it was solemnly declared, in an east-end lodging house. A crew of Lascars had sickened to a man on a schooner just arrived at the Pool of the Tower from Rio Janeiro. Three fresh cases of the suspicious type had occurred in Queen Anne's Road itself. The condition of Bermondsey baffled description. A hospital was to be opened for the sufferers at Hampstead. A floating lazaretto would be stationed at Greenwich. And so forth, and so forth, with the usual marvellous evolutionary vigour of every fresh and sensational report. Talk of germs! no germ on earth can equal it for rapid multiplication. Before evening Harry Chichele's death had reproduced a hundredfold, and the cholera had established itself as a visible and audible reality of life over all the twenty-four quarters of London.

The scare died away in a week, of course. It died a natural death, of pure inanition. Common sense and common courage speedily reasserted themselves. People who had at first spread exaggerated reports soon pooh-poohed with sagacious noses the very existence of any possible source of danger. The one fatal case had been admirably isolated by Dr. Mohammad Ali, the unfortunate Dr. Chichele's able and enthusiastic Oriental colleague. Every precaution that science and skill could suggest to practical wisdom had been enforced and carried out under this excellent medical gentleman's supervision. Dr. Ali, fortified by his Indian experiences, had drawn an efficient sanitary cordon round the infected house from the very first moment; and though this needful step had involved great danger to that brilliant and distinguished lady novelist, Miss Seeta Mayne, whose peril had proved a source of the liveliest apprehension to thousands upon thousands who had never seen her and would never see her, "We believe," said the *Times* leader with its oracular gravity, "that but for his firm, judicious, and immediate action, London might have been visited by such an epidemic as has hardly been equalled in any European capital."

within the memory of the present generation. To Dr. Ali, indeed, are due the thanks of society for the promptitude with which, at the critical moment of great danger, he took upon himself unsolicited the task shirked by the constituted authorities, and preserving from a desolating and destroying pestilence the greatest, wealthiest, and most populous city of modern Christendom."

Mohammad Ali smiled sardonically to himself as he read those lines, as he thought how small an accident of fate might have turned that lavish praise into contemptuous condemnation of his stupidity and incompetence. Kismet, kismet! it is all destiny. Everything depends on the tossing of a penny—especially in the case of public opinion. Heads—you are a hero of unexampled fortitude! tails—you are at once a fool and a coward!

"The world will learn with pleasure," the *Times* went on in its dignified way, "that Miss Mayne has not suffered in health or strength from her devoted nursing of Dr. Chichele and his unhappy widow. We are glad to welcome Miss Mayne back to the restored freedom of the outer world after the brief period of enforced seclusion to which Dr. Ali's admirable salutary regulations have for a while consigned her."

As Seeta Mayne read those words, in the solitude of her own room at the Chicheles' widowed house (for she still stopped there) they brought home to her with more awful clearness than ever the utter loneliness and inexpressible misery of her false position. No one could sympathize with her; no one could pity her. Her grief was locked up in her own bosom. For Olwen, the newspaper writers had their glib expressions of conventional sympathy and commonplace condolence—"her husband had lost his life nobly in a noble cause"—"each victory of science demanded its victims"—"how could man better die than for the good of humanity"—and so forth, and so forth, with sickening reiteration; but for her, shattered and lacerated and utterly broken-hearted, they had what?—congratulations, congratulations, congratulations on her lucky escape from that longed-for death, which to her would have been most welcome far of all things. Oh, vain conceit of man, to fathom or divine the hopes and motives of your fellow creature! Condolence to Olwen, happily insensible on her bed of illness! Congratulations to Seeta, gnawing her own wounded heart in silence, and looking out henceforth upon a blank universe, from which all the joy and hope and happiness had faded away irretrievably for ever! So things are meted by our infallible mentors.

For Olwen still remained quite insensible. Long after all the cholera scare was dead and buried in back numbers; long after Ali had relaxed the strict quarantine which he kept for three weeks over the whole house and every one in it; long after Seeta had been sent back to the world, if she cared to enter it; and Lizbeth had been cured and remitted for convalescence to a remote sea-side cottage-hospital; and the other servants had been pronounced secure from all taint of infection—Olwen still lay rigid and immovable on her sick bed in her own bedroom. For her, everybody's sympathy was warm and vivid. That

dear little Mrs. Chichele so ill and insensible in bed, you know ! Her husband's death quite unstrung her. She was recovering, they say, before he died—cholera and that sort of thing quite subdued ; when Miss Mayne (of "Percival's Tryst," that sweet novel) imprudently left her for a moment in a room by herself ; and up she got, delirious of course, quite mad with fever and fright and agony, and crept barefooted into the next room—to find her husband there actually dying. The shock made her go just senseless on the spot ! That is how much we all know, from the outside only, of all these intimate domestic tragedies. Even Seeta herself knew and guessed no more. Mohammad Ali and Lizbeth alone could tell the whole truth and both their mouths were sealed for ever. The world, as usual, saw the externals, and nothing more ; and on the strength of the externals—which were nought after all—the world said, in its easy way, it was a very sad and pathetic story.

They buried Harry Chichele with full scientific honours. The Royal Society stood uncovered beside his open grave, and the College of Physicians waxed loud and eloquent in his praise as an enthusiastic discoverer, whose one object and ideal had been to save life for his fellow creatures. In the humbler circles, Lizbeth, sobbing, repeated over and over again, "'E was kind to me, an' 'e was kind to mother" ; and Bill the periwinkle man, a hero still at the free-and-easies in his London gin-palace, on the strength of having so narrowly escaped hanging, observed to his pals as he read the account with many stumblings in his weekly paper, "That's the cove as got me off at the 'Ome Office wen the judge an' jury was a-poin' to 'ang me. 'Is 'eart was in the right place any'ow." And so the real Harry Chichele was dead and buried safely in his grave ; and a false Harry Chichele, an ideal good doctor, who was all heroism, and devotion, and philanthropy, and gentleness, lived on with a certain transient objective immortality in other men's mouths and hearts and praises. Our idols, indeed, have feet of clay. How little we, any of us, really know what passes anywhere beneath the surface !

A granite obelisk in Kensal Green Cemetery still informs the infrequent visitor, in chiselled letters, that Harry Chichele, M. B., F. R. C. P., F. R. S., died for science, on the 7th of August, eighteen hundred and eighty something.

But of all this Olwen knew nothing.

Seeta waited and watched her tenderly. Mohammad Ali watched her, too. Her convalescence was long and doubtful. For weeks she hardly seemed to get at all better. Not, indeed, that her case was dangerous. They feared no probability of death or serious bodily derangement. She suffered simply from a state of utter mental imbecility. She took food at intervals readily enough, as a baby might take it ; in between, she lay, like a baby in a cradle, motionless and helpless, crying at times, but never moving, or looking, or speaking. Sense and thought and language had left her ; she remained the mere outer bodily wreck of the Olwen Chichele that once had been.

As time went on, however, she mended gradually. The world began

again, as it begins in childhood. They taught her to speak ; taught her from the first, word by word, almost as they might have taught a young baby. She learnt rapidly, but it was real learning, not mere remembering ; her vocabulary to start with was narrow and simple ; and it enlarged only by regular and gradual stages. She remembered nobody ; she remembered nothing. They had telegraphed to Cornwall for her father to come when she was first taken ill, but he arrived only after Harry's death ; and when Olwen saw him she didn't for some weeks appear even to recognize him. She spoke of Ali as "the good black man," and of Seeta as "that dear girl ;" but otherwise she never seemed to recall anything personal at all about them. For Harry she never even asked, and no one dared to mention his name before her. It seemed as though the shock of that awful revelation, sweeping through her like lightning, had wholly altered and obliterated a vast tract in her brain, the entire tract that dealt with Harry and with her memory of everything that had happened to them both since she first knew him. No wonder it was so. The Harry she had once known and loved, indeed, had disappeared utterly as though he was not ; and his disappearance, in the gulf of that horrible discovery, had blotted out the entire consciousness of all that had ever in any way related to him. In its place had arisen a vague and terrible shrinking dread ; a dread that grew like a mushroom in her brain ; an unfailing horror of being left alone in the rooms where she had lived with him and had heard his forgotten confession. Bit by bit it spread through her soul till it had taken possession of every cell and fibre of her being. Where Harry Chichele's image had once been, a nameless horror now seemed to sit throned and supreme within her.

The confession itself was forgotten with all the rest ; but not the abiding and ghastly terror of the empty room in which she had first heard it. Gradually, as Olwen's senses and ideas returned, there grew up within her an appalling consciousness of some horrible entity in the adjoining room—some grisly being that perpetually weighed upon her with an ineradicable sense of its awful nearness. She didn't think it would get out and hurt her ; she didn't give it any name or bodily shape ; but she knew it was there, by day and by night, whatever it might be, and that it was deadly and venomous like a serpent or a pestilence. When Seeta or Mohammed Ali were not close by her side it specially haunted her. She didn't see it, but she felt its proximity. It was in there, for ever, intangible but real, unknown and unknowable, an awful shadow, enveloping and darkening her entire existence. She vaguely connected it with murder and with cholera. She thought at times it was a sort of sound or noise ; a form of words ; a terrible cry ; a killing sentence ; an embodied curse or audible destiny. Whoever went in there would hear it and die—die in inexpressible mental agony.

Its shapelessness was ghastlier than any mortal shape. Its emptiness was worse than any form or substance.

"Papa," she said one day, holding his hand tight, as soon as I'm well enough, take me away, away somewhere. Do take me away,

somewhere. I'm so afraid of it. It keeps there always. It never goes out, it never ceases, even when I'm asleep. I feel it there, fixing its awful eyes upon me. It frightens me horribly. I don't like it."

Her father soothed her hand gently. "My child," he said in a tentative voice, for Mohammad Ali had suggested to him what he ought to say, "would you like some day to go home to Cornwall?"

Olwen turned the word over and over in her head. "Cornwall," she repeated. "Is it pretty there? Is it a nice place? Is it like the country? Are there trees and rocks and flowers and water?"

Tears trickled slowly down the rector's face.

"Olwen," he said "don't you remember Cornwall? Don't you know Polperran? Dear old Polperran? You must remember your mother's grave? You must remember Polperran, surely?"

"Dear old Polperran," Olwen answered with a smile, as if the words somehow awakened a faint chord in her lost memory. "Dear old Polperran! Is that in Cornwall? Are there trees there? Are there rocks and flowers? And, oh, will *It* be there, when we go, father?"

Mohammad Ali, standing in the background, framed his lips with an emphatic No. "No, no, my darling," the rector answered, boldly. "*It* will stop here. *It* shall never follow you. As soon as we can move you, you shall go to Polperran."

"That will be nice," Olwen answered, with a faint smile. She very seldom smiled now. *It* seemed to have taken all the gladness and laughter out of her.

"And there's sea at Polperran, you know," her father went on, in a pleased voice, as one talks to a child. "Sea, and cliffs, and pebbles, and sands. Oh, such dear little coves, with lovely sands in them, as white and smooth and hard as marble."

"And shells?" Olwen asked curiously, looking up in his face.

Her father nodded—he could hardly speak. "And shells, my darling, that you used to pick up when you were a little girl, and bring home in your frock for me and mother."

"I remember," Olwen said simply. It was the first time since that awful night she had ever said she remembered anything.

So from that day forth it was firmly settled that they should all go in a body to Polperran, as soon as Olwen could be removed with safety.

A day or two later, when she was able to be carried down in her arms into the drawing-room, Mohammad Ali laid in her way, as if by accident, a dark blue velvet photograph frame, in which there had formerly stood a cabinet portrait of Harry. He wanted to try his experiment very gently and tentatively, for fear of exciting her, and bringing on a relapse; so he had removed the portrait, and replaced it by another of Seeta Mayne, in the fancy costume she had worn at the Artists Ball, when she went there a year before with Olwen and Harry. Olwen's eyes fell upon the frame with a careless glance: oh, strange: she never seemed even to notice the substitution. Curious! It was indeed like a lightning stroke. Her memory of Harry appeared to have died out altogether! Heaven grant it may be so, Ali thought to himself. Allah is wise; Allah is merciful. The brain is a delicate and wonderful

maze. Perhaps in his inscrutable wisdom this was his strange and chosen way of blotting out that hideous past for Olwen.

After an hour or so Mohammad Ali took the frame away from the little octagonal table on which it stood, and gently replacing Harry Chichele's photograph, laid it down without a word within sight of Olwen. She raised her eyes and let them rest carelessly on the portrait for a second. Seeta and her father, standing behind the sofa where she lay wrapped in her white woollen shawl, scanned her face with intense interest. She gazed at the photograph for a moment with the look of childish unconcern and wonderment; then the scared expression came over her once more; she cast up her eyes and said to Ali in her sweet gentle infantile way, "Put back the other one, will you, please? It's so much prettier. I like it better. That one seems to frighten and worry me somehow. I like yours best, dear," turning to Seeta, "because you know you've always been so kind and good to me."

To Seeta Mayne the words seemed terrible indeed. She covered her face with her hands and burst into tears. It was hardly possible for her to understand so strange a forgetfulness. His own wife! the woman who had carried off that coveted prize! who had been privileged to call Harry Chichele husband! And that she should wholly forget him thus! While she herself—Seeta—a mere friend—an admirer from outside—could never, never, never forget him! Her heart ached with a void and hungry aching? What was Olwen's grief to hers, she cried to herself, passionately and blindly, in her utter agony.

Only Mohammad Ali comprehended it all, and thanked God in his heart for that happy oblivion. A terrible change had come over Olwen's brain; the more complete and final, the better indeed for her future happiness.

He ventured on a further and more crucial test. Holding the photograph frame in his hands before her very eyes, he began slowly to withdraw the second portrait. "Wouldn't you rather have this one left?" he asked as he withdrew it. "I think you'd rather. You know it's Harry's."

"Whose?" Olwen asked in a sharp voice, with a quick little turn of her wasted neck.

"Why, Harry's," Ali answered, with trembling lips, fixing his keen eyes watchfully upon her. "Harry's," of course. "Harry's! Harry's! You remember Harry."

The frightened girl paused for a second; then she shook her head dubiously and looked pained and puzzled. "Harry," she repeated, with the air of one who tries hard to recall some forgotten detail of no real importance. "Harry? Harry? I suppose it's Harry's. Oh, Harry, is it? Ah, yes, I dare say. But take away the man's and give me hers. I like it best. It's so much prettier. You know, dear, you've always been so kind and sweet to me."

Seeta lifted up both her hands to her face, and rushed, horror-stricken, out of that desecrated drawing-room.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE ship of Colonel Mayne's affairs, meanwhile, had been drifting into more and more perilous waters. While Olwen and Harry were ill, indeed, he had managed to avoid the most dangerous reefs—to put off his heaviest and most importunate creditor by audacious promises that as soon as the quarantine of Queen Anne's Road was once fairly raised he would find the wherewithal in one lump sum for paying him every rupee he owed him. It was magnificent; but it was not finance. Promises at last come home to roost. As soon as the scare had finally died down, and communications with Seeta, that sanitary suspect, might be safely re-established, the solicitor who represented the Indian banker would no longer be satisfied with such generously hypothetical and contingent statements; he demanded fact, hard fact—immediate and categorical cash payment. Coin is much more intractable than paper. Arthur Mayne was at his wit's end. The blockade was raised, and still no money was forthcoming. There was nothing for it but an appeal to Mohammad Ali. As a man of taste, Arthur Mayne didn't relish such indecent precipitancy, to be sure; for Harry Chichele's body had scarcely yet grown cold in the grave, and his widow—that sweet little woman with black eyes, who went a walk with him one day on Hampstead Heath—was still seriously ill in her own bedroom. But necessity and solicitors know no law (if so gross a libel on a learned profession may pass unchallenged)—or, at any rate, necessity knows no law, and solicitors know no mercy; so in the end, Colonel Mayne took up his hat and stick one fine September morning, just a week before the date fixed for rejoining his regiment in Ireland, and called on the Baboo fellow at the house that had once been Harry Chichele's.

For very shame's sake, he asked first to see his sister. Natural affection prompts a man to call on his own relations. Seeta came down to him in the little study, so pale and broken that even Arthur Mayne, not by nature a particularly sympathetic man, was shocked and grieved at her altered appearance. Proud and erect and beautiful still, Seeta looked whole ages older than when he last saw her. Arthur Mayne scanned her over in dismay. He was proud of his clever and queenly sister; it was a shock to him to see her so changed and wasted.

He tried to say as much, after his own fashion, in a few clumsy and awkward sentences—intended, as he thought, to express his regret without showing too plainly the depth of his disappointment; but Seeta cut him short with an imperious wave of her thin white hand. "We know all that," she interposed curtly. "I'm plain and old. I've lost my looks. I'm tired and ill. I'm worn out with nursing. My life's done. I've nothing to live for. I don't want to live. I'm dead."

already.—Accept so much as proved preamble. Now go on. Never mind me. Never mind my looks. I don't care if I look like a scarecrow now. There's nobody left for me to care about. I've had my day. I exist in future as security for you. That's all. You may mortgage me if you like. Body and soul, you may put me up to auction. How much, bid, gentlemen, on the entire earnings, income, copyright and revenue, of this broken and decayed popular novelist, henceforth and for ever? No reasonable offer refused. Mortgage made over in perpetuity to the highest bidder. I'm yours. Dispose of me. Well, now, what do you want me to do? To go down on my knees for you to Mohammad Ali?"

Colonel Mayne twirled his watch-chain nervously. "Well, not exactly that, Seeta," he answered with some awe; "but I'm in a deuced awkward fix, you know. I should certainly like you to use your influence with him to intercede with his father in the matter of sundry acceptances and securities, which —"

"That'll do," Seeta, said, interrupting him once more. "Arthur, I'm ashamed to speak on such a subject at all at such a moment to Mohammad Ali; but I'm your slave now—I've nothing else left on earth to live for—and I suppose I must do it. You rub your ring, and the slave obeys you." She moved to the door and opened it with a sweep. "Dr. Ali," she called up the stairs, "will you come in here to my brother for a moment?"

Mohammad Ali entered and bowed a bow of distant politeness to the now deferential and submissive colonel. There is nothing on earth so annoying to an officer and a gentleman as the disagreeable necessity for borrowing money or its equivalent from anybody whom he has previously looked down upon, or treated with insolence. Arthur Mayne felt very small indeed; but there was no help for it now; he must go right through with it and swallow his feelings.

He glanced at Seeta, with an appealing eye; but Seeta was inexorable. Her face flushed, and she said nothing. A man may push even the women of his family too far. Her patience was exhausted, and her pride was sorely touched. He must get out of his own scrapes himself the best way possible.

Colonel Mayne, therefore, humming and hawing painfully, explained the whole matter as well as he was able, in his inarticulate fashion to Mohammad Ali. At the best of times the colonel was not lucid; finance drove him into complete muddle-headedness. Mohammad Ali, courteous and urbane, but distant still, listened with a growing sense of discomfort to his roundabout and extremely apologetic explanations. The sensitive Indian felt the humiliation for Seeta most acutely. At last, when Colonel Mayne, at the end of one of his long and involved periods, paused for a moment and pulled out his handkerchief, with an ineffective sigh, Mohammad Ali said quietly, "I think Miss Mayne's presence here any longer is quite unnecessary. We two can manage this business together better without her."

"Now let us understand one another in full," Mohammad Ali said, after Seeta had swept out of the room with a stately inclination of her

head, and a burning sense of shame in her heart. "You owe my father money, do you?"

"Well, the Sayyid holds some small notes of hand of mine," Colonel Mayne replied, evasively, shuffling in his chair.

"Precisely so," Mohammad Ali went on with a patient smile. "You owe him money for advances he has made to you. He holds your notes of hand for the amount. How much? The total, instantly."

"Well," Colonel Mayne began, twisting his moustache, "you see, it's like this; there's a bill at three, six, nine, twelve, renewed quarterly, for ten thousand rupees, which I drew at Calcutta in the year —"

"I don't want particulars," Mohammad Ali interposed shortly, with an impatient shrug. "You must see that this interview is equally unpleasant and distressing for both of us. Let us at least make it brief. Simply state the grand total."

Colonel Mayne, thus compelled to face solid facts without any reservation—the last thing on earth a man in pecuniary embarrassments can ever be brought to do—muttered in a nervous shame-faced way, with eyes attentively fixed on the pattern of the carpet, "Why, the grand total, if you will have it, must be somewhere about three thousand five hundred, as well as I remember."

"Pounds?"

"Pounds sterling."

Mohammad Ali nodded. He calculated silently in his head a moment. "Good," he said, after a short pause, "I can meet that much. Three thousand five hundred. It's a tight pull, but still I can meet it. You need trouble your head no further on the matter."

The colonel could hardly believe he heard aright. The Baboo must surely be mad or dreaming! "Three thousand five hundred," he repeated incredulously. "You understand, not rupees, but pounds sterling. You'll use your interest with your father for a general renewal? We can consolidate the bills—they're of various dates—and my sister will back them all for me willingly. Her novels, you know, make a capital security; all going copyrights; and she would be willing to mortgage —"

Mohammad Ali waved his hand once more impatiently. "Excuse me," he said; "you wholly misunderstand the nature of my proposition. There need be no definite paper agreement at all between us. This is a debt of honour. I will undertake to settle the matter directly myself, and you shall transfer the debt to me—as a debt of honour—to be repaid whenever and however you find it convenient."

"But the interest?" Colonel Mayne suggested, with a knowing smile. The Baboo, after all, was devilish cunning. So much effusiveness must mean high rates. He was going to leg him in sixty per cent., and then make a point of having transacted business on a purely gentlemanly and generous basis.

"I'm not a financier," Mohammad Ali replied with a cold smile. "I'm a professional man. I require no interest, no notice, no security, no agreement. I merely ask you to give me your word of honour that,

whenever you are able, you will repay me the principal, in whole or in part ; and that you will trouble Miss Mayne as little as possible with your pecuniary affairs and embarrassments in future."

"And you wish me in return ?" the colonel asked, wriggling uncomfortably.

"I wish you to agree to my terms ; that's all," Ali answered, growing hot in the face with the awkwardness of the situation.

"What terms ?" the colonel cried, waxing red in his turn, and glaring at the Indian suspiciously across the table.

"The terms I have mentioned," Ali replied, drawing himself haughtily up. "I make no bargain. I'm not a huckster. My only desire is to serve you in this matter."

"With no ulterior end ?" the colonel suggested, still very angry, but with an insinuating smile.

"I can have no ulterior end on earth," Mohammad Ali answered, not guessing his false tack, "except to serve a friend of Mrs. Chichele's."

The colonel nodded. So that was the way the wind blew, was it ? Really the native mind is quite inscrutable. He could hardly understand this high and mighty Baboo fellow. The man gave himself such ridiculous airs—pretending to the sentiments and manners of a gentleman. But business is business ; and in business matters one must sometimes knuckle down to the men who hold the whip-hand over you. Colonel Mayne dissembled his insolence and dislike, and added in a tone intended to be positively genial, "Then you will telegraph over about the matter at once for me ?"

Mohammad Ali bowed his head in silence. "I'll telegraph over," he added shortly.

"And you'll stop these confounded solicitor people ?"

"Certainly. I'll call upon them in Chancery Lane to-morrow morning."

The colonel hummed. "Of course," he said, "I shall be happy, Dr. Ali, to pay any little expenses you may incur in the matter—the telegram and so forth."

Mohammad Ali rose from his chair like a wounded creature and gazed at the Englishman with supreme contempt. Mohammad Ali spoke with crushing distinctness. "When a gentleman endeavours to do some small act of politeness to serve another," he said quietly, "he does not expect to be paid his expenses."

Colonel Mayne shrank into his boots. To what beastly rebuffs one exposes one's self, really, when once one begins to accept favours from one's natural inferiors. "Then I may understand," he said in a feeble tone, "that you will induce your father immediately to abandon all proceedings ?"

"The money shall be paid to-morrow," Ali answered, still standing

"The money ? What money ?"

"The money you owe him. I will sell out stock of my own this afternoon in order to settle it."

Colonel Mayne stared. "Then you don't mean to ask your father to wait for it ?" he exclaimed in surprise.

"I think far too highly of Miss Mayne," Mohammad Ali answered, with a touch of scorn in his clear soft voice, "ever to dream of letting any one else on earth know that her brother had been compelled to seek my aid in his pecuniary difficulties. I regret you should have let her know, yourself. As it is, she shall never learn the extent and mode of your indebtedness to me, unless you yourself tell her, which I trust you will have the delicacy and kindness not to do. So far as I am concerned, I shall merely say to her that the question of your liabilities has been amicably settled between us on easy terms, without the necessity for her own intervention as a personal security. My father shall know nothing at all about this business, except that his solicitors have been paid in full the whole sum due from you, principal and interest. The debt shall remain a debt of honour between you and me, as long as you like, repayable whenever you find it convenient. Is that clear enough? Very well, then. Now the question has been quite thrashed out. This is a painful and uncomfortable interview for both of us. Let us cut it short at once. Let us go upstairs and join Miss Mayne and Mrs. Chichele."

They mounted the stairs together in silence. In the drawing-room they found the rector, Olwen and Seeta.

Mohammad Ali joined the two women by the window. Colonel Mayne fell into a chat in the back part of the room with Mr. Tregellas.

"Ah, yes, a very kind fellow, the Mohammedan," the rector remarked, with a graceful air of condescending liberality, "and extremely good to my poor daughter. She quite likes him. He's so gentle and painstaking. A very excellent fellow, with such nice feelings—such nice feelings, you know, for a black man!"

"Very much so indeed," the colonel echoed shortly, biting his moustache, and strolling towards the window.

Seeta accompanied her brother to the door when he left. "You've settled the matter?" she asked, in an undertone in the vestibule.

"Ye-es," the colonel answered hesitating. "We've settled the matter."

"And you want my signature?"

"N-no; not exactly. He'll do without security. He consents to make it a debt of honour."

"A debt of honour! Then he means to pay the solicitors himself!"

"Well—eh—so I understand him."

"Out of his own pocket?"

"Ye-yes. But, Seeta—don't say so. He particularly begged me never to tell you."

Seeta started, and her cheek flushed crimson. "And you'll allow him, Arthur?" she cried, all her heart sinking with shame within her.

The colonel evinced a deep interest in the lining of his hat. "His father's had a lot of my money already," he answered evasively.

"His father!" Seeta cried. "What on earth does that matter? He's not his father. Arthur! Arthur! I'll never believe you're a Mayne again if you can sleep on your pillow at night till you've paid

him every farthing at compound interest. If you don't, I will. I'll write my fingers to the bone to pay it. I'll burn my candle far into the night every night of the year, sooner than you should be indebted to him for it. I'll flood the libraries with novels by the score rather than let him do it. You cad! You cur! You miserable sneak, you! To take that man's money when you called him a Baboo! Why, he's worth ten thousand such limp parodies of a man as you are! Arthur, I'm ashamed of you! And I'm ashamed to look at him. I shall pay him back, if I write myself dead with it!"

The colonel put on his hat with a crush and went. It's ill talking with angry woman—especially when you know she's got the right of you. He certainly did feel rather small. He hadn't come out of it exactly with credit. But it was some comfort to think that that three thousand five hundred was cleared off, anyhow. The jingling of the guinea is most absorbing music. One of these fine days he must try to repay Mohammad Ali.

Thank heaven, anyhow, he could now rejoin his regiment at London-derry.

A week or two later they began to make preparations for their move to Cornwall. The house in London was to be given up, for Olwen's present income would not suffice to keep it going; and they were all busy selecting the things to be kept and the things to be sold in the sale that Mr. Tregelias contemplated. Olwen, now fairly convalescent in general health, but still quite childish in manner and memory, helped to choose out her own special belongings. She wanted to keep several little ornaments, but amongst them were no personal mementoes of Harry. Seeta was appalled to see her pass them all unnoticed by; it seemed to her nothing short of heart-rending. Mohammad Ali dared not explain. He only said, in his pensive Indian voice, "It's better so. Let her forget, if she can. The one thing I dread is her ever remembering."

Seeta felt that she dreaded it, too; but, for all that, Olwen's forgetfulness weighed upon her heart like a hideous nightmare.

At last they came to the furniture in the boudoir. There, over the mantelpiece, hung a water-colour portrait—the portrait of a bright girlish figure in light summer dress, her hat in her hand, standing out in bold relief against a rustic background of a wooden posted porch and some clambering roses. Olwen stood before it and gazed at it long. "You won't take that," Mohammad Ali said, to see how she would answer.

Olwen lifted her eyes with a flash to his, and answered, "Yes," quite simply.

"I wouldn't if I were you," he suggested once more.

Olwen glanced at the portrait with profounder interest and intelligence than usual. Then she sighed a deep sigh. "Oh yes," said cried with a sudden rush of colour to her pallid cheek, "we must take that, whatever we leave. It was Ivan Royle who painted that for me, you know—a long time ago—down in the place we're going to—Cornwall."

It was the first time she had ever remembered anything of her own accord, without having it recalled to her. Mohammad Ali was half pleased and half frightened. Let her forget. It was better so. "Who painted it, did you say?" he asked again, as if to reassure himself.

Olwen looked him full in the face, with a bright eye. "Ivan Royle," she said. "He painted it, and gave it to me. I remember it all quite well now. It was down at Polperran. I liked Ivan. And I wouldn't go away without it now for all of the universe."

That evening, when Ali was gone, Olwen sat down by herself listlessly at a writing-table. She had recovered the art of writing by this time, and at Seeta's direction, she scribbled a short and hasty note to the banker about some small money matter, and proceeded to sign it—"Olwen Tregellas."

"That won't do, darling," Seeta muttered, half aghast, looking over her shoulder. "You know you must sign it in your married name, 'Olwen Chichele.'"

Olwen gazed at the paper for a minute, perturbed. Then she burst into a flood of childish tears. "I can't understand it," she cried. "I don't understand it at all, Seeta. I *do* remember my own name. I always used to sign myself 'Olwen Tregellas.'"

Seeta clenched her hands hard, and drove her nails deep into the palm. If she hadn't, she couldn't have kept herself from crying aloud with a great cry. So utterly, then, was Harry forgotten!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

At Polperran, Olwen grew rapidly stronger in bodily health, and her mental powers, too, returned to her by slower degrees, though she still remained in many ways extremely childish. She could walk and talk and read and write. But the cloud hung over her nature yet, as might well have been expected; so terrible a shock left its desolating mark deep behind, impressed and scored upon every chord and fibre of her unstrung system. She loved to take the old rambles among the coves and cliffs; she remembered them all now, as through a mist of years; not as most people remember the well-known scenes of adult life, but as we all remember persons and spots that we knew dimly in the first stage of early childhood. Now and again she would say, with a flush of pleased recollection, "This is Lanyon Pool," or "This is Dolly Pengellas;" places and faces came back to her vaguely, as they come back to one who revisits after a long and active life the scenes of his first dim boyish adventures. But not a single thought of Harry ever crossed her poor little troubled mind; he was to her as though he had never been; that one fearful scene in the dressing-room at Queen Anne's Road, in sweeping fiercely through her, had swept away utterly

the Harry she had once known and loved. She could rebuild no other now in her bewildered memory. It was all a blank, as though it had not been. Her earlier life alone returned to her

Nevertheless, a great sadness and darkness oppressed her days. Unconsciously to herself, she felt the need of somebody to lean upon. Her loneliness was ever present to her mind, though loneliness for whom or for what she knew not. "I feel so desolate," she often said with tears in her eyes to Seeta. "You're very kind, you know, dear, and so's the good black man; and papa's always tenderness and sweetness itself to me, but I have a sort of aching want in my heart, somehow; I seem to miss somebody or something. It was torn out, I don't know how. I think I lost it in the next room there. I'd have gone to look in for it before we left London, only I always so dreadfully afraid. That was a horrid room; I hated it, Seeta; it makes me shudder even now to remember it."

"You shall never go back there, dear," Seeta answered as bravely as she could. "You shall always stop here with your father and me. I shall never leave you. I'll stay with you always now and take care of you."

"That's a dear," Olwen would reply, pressing her friend's hand tenderly. "But oh, Seeta, I *am* so lonely. I do wish I could feel like I used to do."

At last, in the spring, as the young birches in the rectory garden were beginning to put forth their tender green leaflets on the slight lithe twigs, Olwen, strolling slowly down the gravel path, and picking cowslips from the rough grass-plot beside her as she went, said abruptly one sunshiny morning to Seeta, "I do wish Ivan Royle was here, Seeta! What a nice time we had here once! How he'd love to paint that delicate little bit there!"

Seeta, aghast and not a little dismayed—for talk about Ivan was to her the most disloyal treason to Harry—answered in a voice half choked with horror, "I dare say he would, dear. It's very pretty."

Olwen walked on a step or two in silence. The leaves were rustling and shivering in the breeze. Then she murmured once more, "Ivan Royle was fond of sketching in the garden here. He used to make such beautiful delicate sketches. I wonder you never hear from Ivan. I should like very much to see him again. After all, he was a very dear, kind fellow."

"Ivan Royle would paint it in colours exquisitely," Olwen went on in childish innocence of the cruel stabs she was giving each time she spoke to Seeta. "He has a wonderful touch for foliage and flowers. He paints long sprays and festoons of creepers as I never saw anybody else paint them. I used to admire his work so much. He'd sit here and paint and talk to me. You know I nursed him through a dangerous illness."

"I know, dear," Seeta answered, hardly able to bear up against her trickling tears, which threatened to burst forth like summer showers. "But don't talk about it. It isn't good for you. It *does* you harm to talk about those old, old times, darling."

"I like talking about Ivan, though," Olwen answered simply. "It isn't like the rest. Everything else about then seems to puzzle me and worry me. I can't put it all together again right, somehow. I've lost the thread. But it's restful and nice, I think, to talk about Ivan."

Seeta could have cried aloud in the bitterness of her despair; she longed to fling herself down madly on the grass, and roll and welter in her abject misery, she was so pierced through and through with inexpressible anguish. To talk about Ivan! Ivan Royle! And this was the woman who had once been married to Harry Chichele!

If Seeta had sinned she had her punishment. This was the very bitterest cup of it all, Forgotten, forgotten, utterly forgotten; by his own wife; and she—she could never, never forget him.

Novels? Just heaven! What novels she could write now! She need not fear for want of insight. She had sounded the full gamut of human wretchedness. She knew every note and tone of despair. She could paint every passion and emotion from within. She wanted no models; she was her own best and most awful model. She wrote with the divine inspiration of those whose own hearts have been deeply lacerated. And she cared not one farthing what praise or gain or blame it brought her. She was dead, dead, dead to the world. She lived now only for Harry Chichele's widow.

And Harry Chichele's widow, walking still unconscious in the garden by her side, broke silence once more with a pensive sigh, "Where's Ivan Royle now, Seeta?"

Seeta started. "I don't exactly know," she answered almost harshly. "Somewhere away in America, I believe. He doesn't often write to me. But Mohammad Ali knows all about him."

Olwen burst into tears at the tone. "Oh, don't speak cross to me," she cried in a piteous voice. "If you speak cross to me it'll break my heart. I didn't know I was asking anything wrong. I didn't know I oughtn't to speak of him. Why, Ivan Royle's your own cousin."

It was a burst of discovery, and Seeta, half frightened, recognized it as such. The precedent alarmed her. She feared how far Olwen's memory might yet piece together the faint recollections of other days. And Seeta dreaded that almost as much as she hated her forgetfulness. But there was no danger. The nearer Olwen approached anywhere to Harry, the more blurred and indefinite did her memories become. What lay around that central point was a vague haze. A vast region of the brain seemed to be utterly disorganized, and all that related to her life with Harry had faded away accordingly into total chaos.

They paced up and down once or twice in silence. Then Olwen spoke again, with still more clear decision. "America's a very long way off," she said, "isn't it? I remember it on the map. I'm sorry Ivan's so far away. I want very much to see him again. Once, Seeta, he was ever so kind to me."

Through the dim wreck and phantasm of the past, Ivan Royle's figure now rose clear and distinct as that of one whom she could once have loved. With childish innocence, she loved him now. Not like a woman, but like a little girl. She murmured over and over again

through the day, "I must look at America again on the map. I'm sorry Ivan's away over in America.

A week later, Mohammad Ali came down for his spring holiday. Olwen was pleased and delighted to see him; proud, like a child, to show him how much she had learned and remembered meanwhile under Seeta's guidance. She could play now as well as ever, she showed him, on the piano; and she recollected her French and her history, and no end of things, which had come back to her, one by one, with increasing distinctness. She talked to Ali as a girl of ten or twelve talks to her big brother; and Ali was grateful in heart for her frankness and her evident liking. A black man has no right to expect much. If he gets gratitude, he may be amply satisfied.

When Seeta told him how Olwen had been talking of late about Ivan, Mohammad Ali's eyes brightened, and he smiled a smile that gave Seeta, loyal as ever to Harry's memory, a cold shudder even to look at. "I'm glad," he said. "That's our one chance. Miss Mayne, I've never told you yet—I had my reason for not telling you—but almost the last words Harry said to me on that terrible day were, 'Ali, Olwen must marry Ivan.'"

Seeta looked up at him full of surprise. The words choked her. "Did Harry say that?" she asked, with a throbbing heart. It was terrible, terrible—but Harry had said it.

"He said that," Ali answered softly. And Ali was a man who spoke the truth. "He said he knew Ivan loved her, and he knew Mrs. Chichele could love Ivan. We two know it, too. It's the one thing on earth now possible to save her."

Seeta clutched hard at the back of a chair. "If Harry said that," she answered through her teeth in a clear voice, but with an evident struggle, "we must carry out his last wishes to the letter. It is horrible to me even to think of it—I don't deny it—having known him to decline on a narrower range of feeling and a shallower heart than his: but if Harry desired it, it must be done at all hazards."

"If you knew all——" Mohammad Ali cried, and then hastily checked himself.

"If I knew all," Seeta answered, shuddering. "Yes, yes, no doubt, if I knew all, I should see differently. But, thank God, I do not know all. I know only that you and Olwen know of something I do not know; and if it would make me think less of Harry I don't want ever to know it, either. I, too, know something I have never told you. I prefer to nurse my most sacred sorrow in my own mute way. It's all I have left me. For mercy's sake don't take it away from me!"

"You do well," Mohammad Ali replied, with tender respectfulness. "I reverence your feelings too much to dream of hurting them. Let us say no more of that. But what can we do now in this matter of Ivan's?"

Seeta's eyes returned to the earth with a start from the abysses of infinity. "He must come to England," she said, quietly. "He must come at once, and you must go and fetch him."

She spoke with the certainty of absolute conviction. His will was

law for her to all the world. Mohammad Ali reflected a moment. "I must go," he said. "Yes, you are right. It would be impossible to explain all this by letter. Especially that. I must go and fetch him."

He had shrunk even from writing to Ivan the whole truth. That truth was too ghastly to confide to any one. But he must face it now. He must tell it all; he must bring Ivan home to help them with Olwen.

As for Seeta, she never faltered for a moment now. Harry had said it, and it must be done. Harry's word was absolute law. She would ask Lizbeth who had been in the room that last night, and Lizbeth would tell her. If Lizbeth confirmed what Ali had said, Ali must go through fire and water to bring back Ivan.

For Lizbeth, too, had remained at Polperran the winter through. Like a dog in everything, she *must* have a master or mistress. It was a want of her nature. Now that Harry was gone, she felt she must cleave to Seeta and Olwen, but above all to Seeta. *He* had loved the tall 'un, she said to herself, and she must do now as the tall 'un wished her. Obedience to Seeta, affection to Seeta, was part of her posthumous devotion to Harry. It was Lizbeth's instinctive religion to fawn upon somebody; and as Harry had seemed to inherit from her mother, so Seeta seemed to her to inherit from Harry.

When Seeta asked her about that last interview, Lizbeth rose, dramatic as ever, from the chair where she sat, and with Harry Chichele's very voice and accent, reduced to her own grammar and vocabulary, she gave an account of the whole incident, in her strange tragic way, "'E up an' 'e says, 'Ali,' says 'e, looking at 'im like this, right through and through, 'as soon as I'm gone,' says 'e, 'an' I'm goin' soon, Ali, Olwen must marry Ivan Royle. That's the only thing as can ever put me out of her memory. 'E's better fitted for 'er,' says 'e 'than ever I was. She could love 'im, an' 'e loves 'er. Let 'er 'ave 'im,' says 'e, 'let 'er 'ave 'im; let 'er 'ave 'im.'"

Seeta bowed her head in acquiescence and wept silently. It was desecration, but it was Harry's wish. That Ivan Royle should aspire to wed Harry Chichele's widow grated on every faith and hope of her being. That Harry Chichele's widow should have a thought left for Ivan Royle shocked and surprised her. But Harry desired it, and Harry must be obeyed. Mohammad Ali must go to America to bring back Ivan.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

So it was finally decided that Mohammad Ali should go to America, to bring back Ivan Royle, no unwilling victim, for Olwen's sake, to his native country.

Where exactly Ivan might be, Mohammad Ali hardly realized. American geography is a blank to most of us. He had only a vague idea in some lost corner of his brain that Ivan's general direction was towards the setting sun, and that he might be confidently looked for as an artist at large among the furthest recesses of the Rocky Mountains. But the Rocky Mountains form a somewhat wide address. Ivan, to be sure, had written to his Indian friend from time, to time, by fits and starts; but of late months letters outward had steadily miscarried. They had been sent to Ivan's last known halting-place at frontier towns on the western limit of civilization, which they generally reached after Ivan had left again, with bag and baggage, for parts unknown high up in the Sierras; and thus it came to pass that even so many months after Harry Chichele's death Ivan Royle remained in utter ignorance of the fact that Olwen was now a widow. Had he known all, he would have hurried home to England long since of his own accord. He would have come at once to watch over Olwen in her solitude and terror. But Ivan, disgusted with cowboys and miners, had been sketching for months alone among the loneliest parts of the western mountains with a small party of Indian guides; only going down to the nearest settlement at rare intervals to post his packet of drawings to the Porte-Crayon, and returning as quickly as possible to the wholesome wilds from the polluted neighborhood of faro banks and the drinking saloons. His last known address had been Petroleum Gulch, and to Petroleum Gulch, wherever that might be, Mohammed Ali hoped in time westward to wend his solitary way.

It took him only some twenty-four hours to make his mind up; and when he told Olwen that he was going to America in search of Ivan, Olwen opened her childish black eyes in pleased surprise, and answered, "Thank you," as frankly and as naively as a child might have answered it.

Next day Mohammad Ali took his departure from Polperran, *en route* for Liverpool. As he was about to start, Olwen stood tearful and half-frightened at the gate. She clasped his hand in hers with a sad smile. "Dr. Ali," she said, "you're going a very, very long way. Perhaps you'll never come back to me again. Don't think me ungrateful to you! Don't think me unappreciative. I'm grateful, grateful, oh, so very grateful." She drew a ring from her right hand, and passed it over to him. "I want you to take this with you, please," she said. If you ever come home again, you can give it back to me.

If you don't you can keep it always. I don't know why, but I want you to take it."

Ali looked hard at the shining bauble ; then, yielding for one moment to a sudden impulse—even the best of black men is a man at times—he raised it to his lips with a wild delight and kissed it tenderly. Olwen shrank back half alarmed at the sight. Her shrinking brought Ali back to himself. He dropped his hand with a start of surprise. He had let himself for once be carried away by his feelings. He gazed at it close. He knew the ring well. The stone was a diamond. It was a ring her father had given her when she was first married to Harry Chichele.

So Mohammad Ali went to America.

Immediately on his arrival at New York he took a cab—a hack, the natives call it in their own language—and ordered the Irish American driver to take him up to the Union Square Hotel.

"The Union Square Hotel, is it? All right, mister ; tumble in, thin, will ye?" the Irish American driver answered, with offhand ease.

Mohammad Ali was prepared beforehand for a certain amount of republican familiarity, but so much freedom and simplicity of speech fairly took his oriental breath away.

The Union Square is one of the largest and most fashionable up-town hotels, situated near the confluence of Broadway and Fifth Avenue. The cab drew up at the door, and Mohammad Ali, going inside, demanded of the gorgeous and affable clerk at the office within whether he could be accommodated with a room there.

To his immense surprise, the gorgeous and affable official, though obsequiously smiling to the last applicant, waited for several minutes with marked rudeness before he turned round in the most careless fashion to inquire what Mohammad Ali wanted. "Well, mister," he said, in a nonchalant voice, "what can I do for you now, anyhow?"

Mohammad Ali made a mental note that "Mister," seemed to be the recognized American equivalent for our English "Sir," and that he must, no doubt, be prepared in future to accept it in full of all demands accordingly.

"I want a rooin," he said with chilly politeness. "I informed you as much some two minutes ago."

The gorgeous clerk, staring hard, after a moment's consideration, handed Ali a brass labelled key, numbered 740 in big figures, without a word of comment or apology.

"What floor?" Ali enquired with a courteous inclination.

"What floor? Why, sixth, mister."

"Sixth! Can't you give me a room lower down?"

"Lower down? Why, that's a good 'un! You want a room lower down, do you? Well, now that's smart, that is. No, I can't give you a room lower down, anyhow. You go ahead mister, and take my advice—just keep what you're given."

Ali, too much taken aback by this extraordinary reception to remonstrate further, turned round to the negro porter, who stood grinning and

holding his hand-bag in his dusky hand, ready to show him the way to the elevator.

"Dis way, mistah," the negro said. "Your elevator round de cornah, heah." And he grinned broader and merrier than ever, as he showed Ali the way to a poorly-furnished lift, down a side corridor.

Mohammad Ali had heard so much of the elegance and comfort of American hotels, that he was fairly surprised at this very inferior fourth-rate accommodation. No London hotel would have owned such a lift. It was quite a revelation to him. However, he went up to his own room—a miserable attic at the top of the house, provided with very dirty towels—and shortly descended by the big stairs for lunch to the dining-room.

At the door of the large and handsome dining-room, a negro waiter in evening dress, with very obtrusive white gloves on his burly hands, stood on guard, as it were, upon the very threshold. As Mohammad Ali came up, he advanced smiling. "Beg pardon, mistah," he said with a half-burlesque bow; "dis ain't your dining-room. You must go to de little dining-room on de groun' floah."

Mohammad Ali gazed at him astonished. "This not my dining room," he repeated blankly. "The little dining-room on the ground floor! Why, what do you mean, my friend?"

"Yes, mistah," the negro repeated with dignity. "You doan't dine heah. Cullurd pussons is not permitted in dis hotel at de fust table."

Mohammad Ali stood back, thunderstruck. For a moment he hardly took in what the man meant. "Fellow," he said at last, in an angry tone, "send for the manager. This matter must be cleared up. There's some mistake somewhere. I'll go inside and take a seat. Will you ask the manager to come up and speak to me?"

The negro disappeared, and in a few minutes returned again, all grins, bringing up the manager in tow behind him.

The manager's manner was only a trifle less insolent in its way than the negro's. He listened with a face of amused superiority to Mohammad Ali's indignant expostulation; and then he observed in a quietly contemptuous tone, "This is a free country, I guess, my friend, and every man has a right to run his own hotel the way he chooses, anyhow. Our rule at this house is that coloured persons ain't admitted to the first table. You mayn't approve of it, but still it's our rule. If you don't like it, I reckon you'll have the usual alternative of lumping it. In Europe, folks mayn't object to niggers, but in this country, if I was to allow a gentleman of colour to sit down at my first table, why, I presume I might put the shutters up to-morrow morning, and retire up town on a modest competence. The business wouldn't sell for a pint of peanuts."

Mohammad Ali dropped his hand by his side in impotent despair. "I'll take my boxes," he said, "and go elsewhere."

"You can take your baggage now, right away, if you feel like taking it," the manager replied, sticking his hands carelessly in his trousers pockets. "It's right there, in the front passage. But you'll have the

same trouble at the next hotel you go to, for there's no more than one rule throughout all New York City, and you'll only ruffle your temper more, which seems to be none of the best at any time, if you try over again. I've seen this same kind of trouble going on afore, with European-bred niggers. They ain't accustomed beforehand to the American point of view, and jest at first, of course, they don't exactly like it. They kind of kick at it. But it ain't no use; they've got to get used to it, like pigs to Chicago; and if you mean to stop in the States, you'll find the rule for niggers is to take what you're given or go without. It's the same at every hotel I ever heard of, from Maine to California. No niggers at the first table."

"That's so," the negro waiter ejaculated behind in hearty confirmation. He seemed to take a malicious pleasure in the degradation of one of his own colour.

Mohammad Ali bit his lip. After all, it was only a personal slight, and for *her* sake he would try to put up with it. But his heart sank within him at the idea of the indignity to which he, an Arab of the Arabs, was being subjected by these underbred upstarts. Had it not been for Olwen he would have turned at once and gone back by the very next steamer to Liverpool. But for Olwen's sake he must brazen it out; he must go through with it now, for Olwen, for Olwen.

Yet a painful thought pressed itself upon him. If this was the treatment he received in New York itself, the enlightened and civilized metropolis of the Atlantic seaboard, what sort of reception might he expect to obtain from the wild westerners among whom Ivan Royle had pitched his tent on the rough and rugged slopes of the Rocky Mountains? Mohammad Ali shrank from realizing it. He knew but one thing; he would get away from this hateful town by the earliest train to-morrow morning, and would travel straight ahead, day and night, by car and by stage-coach, through prairie and mountain, till he reached Petroleum Gulch itself, where Ivan Royle had been last heard of. In what part of the world that oddly-named Petroleum Gulch might be, he neither knew nor cared particularly; but he would make his way there by the quickest route, and would bring back Ivan at once to England. He could never rest till he had shaken the dust of that inhospitable republic for ever from his feet, and had planted his sole, a free man once more on the generous soil of free Britain.

In any country of the old world, Mohammad Ali, well born, well bred, cultivated, refined, a gentleman by blood and race and education, would have been received as an equal with open arms in the society of all that was best and highest; in America alone, with all its noisy boasts, his black skin raised an insuperable barrier between himself and the lowest or vilest or most ignorant of white men. He had come to the land of the free to find himself for the first time in all his life subjected to the vile surviving prejudices of old world slavery; he longed to be back in the land which had conquered and enslaved himself and his people, in order that he might feel himself once more a freeman. There is one country in the world, and one alone, where,

black or white, Christian or Mohammadan, European or Asiatic, a man's a man for all that; and that country is certainly not republican America. Mohammad Ali, laying down his head on his sleepless pillow that first night, said to himself ten thousand times over, "I wish to heaven I was back again in free England." How many a disillusioned republican pilgrim from the old world has said the same thing with a full heart before and since him! And yet, so far, he had only touched the outermost threshold of the great Republic. He had still to learn in the wild west the full terrors and horrors of free America.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IVAN ROYLE had not revisited Eagle City for many months. Eagle City was hardly to his taste. It was too occidental in thought and manners for his English fancy. The episode of the Chinaman had sufficed to drive him from the squalid neighbourhood of the Sunset Lode trail, and to turn his steps for a while among the lonely mountains, where nothing more dangerous than Red Indians and grizzly bears were likely to disturb his philosophic and artistic quiet. Chaparral Bill and his rowdy companions grated on Ivan's sense of the fitness of things. He much preferred the unsophisticated red man of the wild west. The simple children of nature stabbed and shot and scalped and got drunk without the faintest pretence that they were the pioneers of Aryan culture in the great west, or that they were planting the germs of American liberty on the rolling confines of the boundless prairies. Ivan rather liked his Indian guides, in fact. They were unpretentiously wicked. The innocent criminality of the born savage does not disgust one like the degenerate and decadent immorality of the outcast and off-scourings of European civilisation in its worst avatars.

At times, however, Ivan found himself compelled by dire necessity to come down from his temporary encampment on the mountain slopes, where he and his Indians subsisted chiefly on the "product of the chase," as Chaparral Bill, who had never shot any game in his life except the human subject, loved to designate it—in quest of supplies and the sinews of war, to Petroleum Gulch or Eagle City. "Wal, tenderfoot," the proprietor of the National Pacific Hotel remarked to Ivan, as he sat down to the table, weary and footsore after a long tramp, at that convenient resting-place a day or two later; "we ain't seen much of you or your money round lately since the boys strung up the yellow-faced laundryman for cheating at poker, have we? You was on the laundryman's side, as I recollect it. You don't see no harm in cheating at poker, you don't. Them principles may go down in the country whar you come from, but they don't suit the Mountain Slope Territories. West of the Mississippi, we go solid for the supremacy of order. The people of the Mountain Slope Territories are an

honest, high-principled, law abidin' community. who object to tricking at cards, and all other forms of swindlin' and dishonesty. But there won't be no dishonesty lyin' around loose in these here diggings for the next week or two. Monte Joe's in the city, now, he is. He's death on law and order, Joe is. There ain't such a chap for backing up the executive and enforcin' moral principles in the whole Territory as Colonel Joseph Jefferson Ridley."

"What, Joe Ridley the murderer?" Ivan asked quietly.

"Some people might call him so," the landlord replied, with an ironical air of affected abstraction, "when Joe wasn't around to explain matters and strenuously resist the defamation of his character. Joe's down on all defamation of character, he is. He can't abide no libel or slander. Never was such a chap for promotin' purity of language. "'Pears to me," he landlord observed reflectively, as he chewed up a slice from a raw lemon, "that in Europe folks ain't got no proper pride in their position as white men. They ain't been brought into contact with inferior races, that's where it is. They don't recognize that a white man's got to shoot an Injun whenever the durned redskin misbehaves himself, or there wouldn't be no law and order anyway. Moral susasion's necessary for the inferior races; niggers and Injuns must do as they'er bid, or you've got to drop 'em. Otherwise there ain't no maintainin' the Caucasian supremacy. There's a nigger come to town, too, by the way, since you was here last. He arrived in the city this afternoon from down trail. The toniest nigger I see; you bet. Gives himself airs like a United States senator, and holds up his head as if he was president of the Union Pacific Railroad, and could boss the whole California State Legislature."

"Indeed," Ivan answered, a touch of pity mingled with the contemptuous irony of his careless tone. "Poor devil, I pity him. These are bad quarters for any nigger to find himself in any day."

"Wal, the boys *will* have their fun out of him, I presoom," the landlord observed, with the air of a man who, for argument's sake, makes a candid admission. "He thinks a sight too much of himself for a nigger, that's whar it is; and the boys are engaged in making him show his teeth like a coyote in a cage when you poke a stick through the bars at him. He's pretty considerably riled, you may take your dying oath on it."

"I suppose it would be useless to interfere between them and their victim," Ivan murmured aloud to himself, with a sinking heart, as he thought of the poor defenceless black man in the hands of so many ruffianly and merciless tormentors.

"That's so. The boys ain't going to have their sport spiled," the landlord admitted with prompt conviction. "Besides, they don't mean to allow no more niggers nor Chinamen of any sort in Eagle City. And this 'ere nigger's a caution to snakes. You never heerd anything like the way he talks: thinks himself own brother to the Emperor of Russia and first cousin to the Vanderbilts of New York City. He's been inquiring after you, too, now I come to think of it. Asked if a chap of the name of Royle, a painter by trade, was fooling round

anywhere in this section. He's come straight on from Petroleum Gulch, where I reckon they raised his dander a bit already. Mad, I call him. Sez he's the Prophet Mahomet, or something of the sort. He's come here last from Europe, but he sez he was raised originally in India. Talked a lot about the Prophet Mahomet—escaped, most likely, from a lunatic asylum somewheres."

A horrible light burst suddenly upon Ivan Royle's mind. He could hardly believe it. So great a misfortune could scarcely be true. It was Mohammad Ali!

In the horror of the moment the name itself escaped his trembling lips. The landlord nodded an unconcerned assent. "Mohammad Harry," he repeated, with a laugh. "Yes, yes, that was just what the nigger called himself. A fine-spoken, high-falutin', Broadway-dude of a nigger: got up like a masher, and talks like a jedge of the Supreme Court. The boys are at him now, makin' him roar like mad, down at the Road to Ruin."

Ivan Royle's blood ran cold within him. Mohammad Ali the butt of the boys at the Road to Ruin! That tender, sensitive, chivalrous black man abandoned to the jibes and jeers, and cruel horse-play of Chapparal Bill and his coarse-minded associates!

"How long has this been going on?" he gasped out in a perfect agony of anticipation. "When did he get there? When did you see him?"

"He came here an hour ago," the landlord answered with a malicious smile, "and the boys are on him at the Road to Ruin like a tarrier on the rats, you bet. Monte Joe's making things tolerable lively for him."

Without another word, Ivan jumped from the table, leaving his steak and beer unfinished as it stood, and rushed down the long, irregular wooden street, till he reached the door of the Road to Ruin.

As he entered that miserable slipshod wooden drinking saloon, a pitiable sight indeed met his eyes. In the midst of a loathsome crowd of rough, unshaven, and unkenapt miners, Mohammad Ali, tall and handsome, with the carriage of a prince and the features of a poet, in dress and aspect every inch a gentleman, stood there at bay, in fierce Indian anger, confronting and defying, with clenched fist and close-set teeth, that wretched group of leering, jeering, sneering vagabonds. His eyes flashed with dangerous fire, and his curling lip flung back upon the men a proud contempt which their natures could never permit them even to understand. On the contrary, they took his fiery resentment for a capital joke, and loud cries of "Well done, nigger!" "Go it, nigger!" "Ain't he toney, neither!" "Don't he carry sone style about him, ruther?" resounded amidst coarse bursts of laughter from every side of the reeking whiskey-shop. Ivan Royle dashed into their midst with true British impetuosity, and before the men had time to recover from their first astonishment, he was grasping Mohammed Ali fervently by the hand, and clearing away the foremost idlers with his strong arms from the throng in the centre that crowded and impeded him.

"Now then, tenderfoot," the nearest miner exclaimed angrily, as Ivan tossed him back upon the group behind with a dash of his hand, "them may be manners where you was raised, but they won't do west of the Mississippi. The nigger's a friend of yours, is he? I thought you was about there yourself, I did. I'll have to trouble you to let go of him this minnit."

Almost before Ivan could realize what was happening, the whole party had closed in around them, and was hustling them now in real earnest, with many savage cries of indignation and astonishment. Took the nigger's part, did he? So much the worse for him." "Niggers have got to clear out of Eagle City?" "We go in for the Caucasian supremacy!" "The tenderfoot must go!" "Draw on the nigger, Bill!" "No amalgamation!" "Who says niggers and Chinamen?"

Ivan and Ali looked around them in despair. They might have fought and sold their lives dearly; but to do more than that was simply impossible. Ali laid his hand on Ivan's shoulder. "Royle," he said in a low whisper; "Harry Chichele's dead, and Mrs. Chichele has been seriously ill. For her sake, I came to bring you home to England. For her sake, I hope you'll try to get away peaceably. Don't fire on these curs; it's better to endure it. I've borne and put up with a good deal already. I don't mind putting up with it a little longer now that I've found you at last. If only we can once get away down the trail towards the Union Pacific it'll be all right. The people below are only insolent. Don't let's fight. Let's make any terms on earth with them, and take our lives in our hands only."

Ivan Royle turned round to the men appealingly. "Look here," he said, holding them off for a moment once more with his powerful arm. "We don't want to fight. We want fair play, and nothing else. No derringers, if you please, gentlemen. Give us room, and we'll clear out of Eagle City at once. We're going to England. My friend, who is no nigger, but an Eastern gentleman, has come in search of me on important business. Let us go, and we'll never darken your doors again. You don't want us. Why should you keep us? We've done you no harm, why molest us?"

The rowdies talked together for a moment, and then Chaparrel Bill, the spokesman of the set, answered with an oath, "What do you want to go an' assault us for, then? We was sittin' here, like a party of gentlemen in their own saloon, havin' a bit of a talk with the nigger from Europe—makin' kind inquiries after his friends and relations, and admirin' his style and store clothes—and in you come like a young earthquake, jostling' and hustlin' a group of peaceable an' unoffendin' citizens, and' takin' the nigger's part, and assaultin' the police in the execution of their dooty; and then, when peaceable citizens rally to the side of the law and order, you call out like a gal afore you're hurt, and begin to talk about making tracks for Europe. Wal, you can go whenever you like. We ain't got no personal quarrel with you. You've allus behaved, on the whole, decent and regular. But not the nigger. No nigger shall come cavortin' around Eagle city like that, and

expectin' to paint the town red, with his durned style, and then go off again without payin' for it, whenever it pleases him, anyway. Niggers has got to pay for style : and they pay for it with their hides, I guess, in this community." He stepped aside and made a little lane for Ivan down the midst to the door. "You can go, if you like," he said, once more, in a tone of authority to the Englishman, "but not the nigger. Nigger, say, you stand right thar, and mind your own business, till we're ready to larrup you."

Ivan Royle's blood boiled over. "You cur," he cried, pushing back Chaparral Bill with his clenched hand, angrily. "Touch him, if you dare ! If you do, you shall feel the weight of an English fist on that ugly nose of yours."

"Go," Mohammad Ali exclaimed, at his ear in haste. "Never mind me. For her sake, go. I can sell my life easily for two of theirs. Start down the trail as hard as you can go for the Union Pacific ! I shall have lived my days if only I can send you home safe to her."

"Never !" Ivan answered aloud. "I will never leave you. Ali, Ali, I'd die a thousand times over sooner than leave such a man as you are to these ruffian's mercy. I know them too well. They're fiends incarnate. If we must die, we'll die together. Stand clear there, you blackguards. Don't lay a hand on us. I shall take this gentleman up with me to my own hotel."

At the word *gentleman*, applied to the black man, the circle of outcasts gave a loud shout of unfeigned merriment. As it died away Chaparral Bill stepped forward once more and clapped his hands resolutely on Ivan's shoulder. "Very well, boys," he said, "the tenderfoot don't accept our terms. He won't give up his durned nigger. Let him take his trial, then. He's committed an assault on half a dozen of us. In absence of any duly constituted authority, I arrest him an' the nigger on a charge of riot. Close in there, all of you boys, right an' left. Hold 'em tight, boys, an' march 'em off straight to the Dew Drop."

The boys carried out their instructions to the letter.

At the Dew Drop, they locked them up all night in an empty room, while they themselves deliberated as to what further steps should be taken to punish these two intrusive foreigners for the crime of rioting.

Mohammad Ali spent most of the night in talking to Ivan. There was much to tell and much to explain. But somehow, in that wild far-western world, even Harry Chichel's crime seemed less ghastly than before. It had at least the outer gloze of culture and European refinement to mask and conceal its inmost hideousness. Compared to such men as Chaparral Bill, Harry Chichele himself grew for the moment into a tender-hearted, educated, ill-advised English gentleman. It was easier to deal with the deadliest germs than the brutal violence of that nest of robbers.

CHAPTER XL.

NEXT morning, about ten o'clock, Chaparral Bill, accompanied by a large and boisterous contingent of the boys, came around to interview them. The man assumed a queer consequential air of judicial power in the absence of any constituted authority. He acted as though he were mouthpiece of law and order, while he appeared to consider that the two prisoners had been caught in flagrant rebellion against the Government and people of the United States, and their representatives in Eagle City.

"Wal, tenderfoot," he said, regarding Ivan with curious interest, as though he were a specimen of some rare wild animal, "the boys have been thinking this matter over, and they've deputed me to give the result of their deliberations."

"I'm obliged to them for their polite attention," Ivan replied with stolid self-suppression, gazing round in unconcealed aversion and disgust upon the rough crowd of dirty and ill-shaven miners.

"The boys consider," Chaparral Bill went on with severe gravity, "that you both put on a durned sight too much style. The boys don't approve of style. They don't approve of it, even in a white man; but they arn't going to stand it, they say outright, in a woolly-headed nigger."

"The boys are of opinion, too," Chaparral Bill continued, in the voice and manner of an official speaker, "that you can't be much of a white man yourself, or you wouldn't be so uncommon thick with niggers, and Injuns, and yellow-faced Chinamen. You ain't got no proper pride of race, you haven't, that's whar it is. You don't support the Caucasian supremacy. The boys are all for equal rights, they are; but the're death on supporting the Caucasian supremacy."

"Indeed," Ivan answered with ironical emphasis.

"Well," Chaparral Bill began afresh, turning round to Ivan, "under these painful circumstances, the boys are of opinion, tenderfoot, that Eagle City ain't the proper environment adapted for yourself, and your friend the nigger. You're a deal too ready with your big fists, and you tend to provoke a breach of the peace with the freedom of your comments on men and institootions. At first sight, some of the boys was for severe measures. They proposed to utilize you for starting our projected new cemetery down the Coyote Canyon. But they've decided, instead, that a small party of us should lead you down the Coyote Canyon as far as the sage-brush, and, as one might put it judicially, escort you to the frontier, requesting you to vacate the city limits."

To Mohammad Ali, who did not know the very meaning of the word sage-brush, that awful sentence, pronounced with all the cool blood-

thirsty humour of the western American, conveyed but little idea of its real and terrible import. He imagined merely that "the boys," in the exercise of an unexpected clemency, intended to see them safely out of Eagle City, and to take care that they did not return to it. But to Ivan, who knew the sage-brush well, the decree of that informal though none the less potent and final tribunal came home at once in all its ghastly and fatal reality. The tender mercies of the wicked are very cruel. He was only too well acquainted with the nature of the sage-brush, that awful desert of waterless alkaline sand and clay that intervenes between the mountain region and the grass-clad prairie. He knew that the desert was trackless and impassable; that return up the Canyon was blocked by their present captors and judges; that no other way back to the Pacific slope was anywhere practicable. He recognized, in short, that Chaparral Bill's lightly-spoken sentence was nothing other than a sentence of death by slow starvation. Starvation long and hideous and unspeakable in a thirsty land, of blinding dust, and deadly irritating saline exhalations. He held his breath, and looked hard at Ali. It was too horrible to believe. And yet he knew those rough and lawless men far too well not to feel sure that they really intended this unearthly devilry. The dark places of the earth are full of cruelty.

"Before we get the escort under way, though," Chaparral Bill continued, turning with a nasty smile to Mohammad Ali, "there's one little point I'd like to settle with you right here, if you please, Mr. Nigger. I observe you've got a very nice ring on your derved dark hand there; and if I can trust myself for anything of a judge—which I ought to be by this time—I should say the stone in it's a genuine diamond. Now, I never took anything off a fellow critter's body afore—that is to say, not as long as he was alive, anyhow; but I don't hold with a nigger wearing diamonds. It's too much style, that's what I call it. In the interests of peace and of the Caucasian supremacy, I'll trouble you, Sambo, to take that ring off and hand it over."

Mohammad Ali's eyes were like an angry wild beast's to look at. It was *her* ring, and he would sooner ten thousand times have died where he stood than have yielded it up to that miserable miscreant. "You infernal scoundrel," he cried, leaping wildly forward, and hissing out the words fiercely from between his clenched teeth, "if you take that ring, you'll have to take it off my dead body. And if you dare to advance a single step nearer me, by heaven, as sure as you're standing there, you son of a dog, I'll blow your confounded worthless brains out." As he spoke, he drew for the first time his revolver from his breast pocket, and pointed it straight at the wretched bully's right temple.

Chaparral Bill sprang back in surprise. Evidently this was a very different species of nigger from the kind of nigger to whom he was accustomed in St. Louis or San Francisco. So strange an apparition took his breath away for a moment, and left him undecided what on earth to think of it.

"Now, listen to me, you blackguard," Mohammad Ali went on more coolly, covering Chaparral Bill all the while with the muzzle of his

revolver. "My friend Mr. Royle and I are British subjects. You can shoot us both here now, if you like, though I give you fair warning we'll sell our lives dearly if you try it on, and *you* shall be the very first we fire at. But if you shoot us you'll have to answer for it. We're not Americans, thank God; we're British subjects. There's law for British subjects, all the world over, even here in your dirty little backwoods encampment. You may get off scot free, if you kill us, for this moment; but as soon as we're missed at home, our Government will make enquiries of your Government at Washington; and your Government will hunt you down, man by man, through fire and water; and in the end, if heaven and earth have to be moved for it first, not a soul that has borne a hand in this cowardly crime but will be strung up for it, and hanged by the neck on the gallows till dead, as you every one of you richly deserve to be. Hands off, and mind my words; the very first man that fires a shot will have to answer for it to the United States' courts and to the British Government."

"That's so," a quiet voice in the background assented gravely.

Every eye turned instinctively to the last speaker. It was Monte Joe. That accomplished gambler, robber, and murderer, superior to the rest in cunning and crime, was superior to them, too, in information and intelligence.

"You agree with the nigger, then, Colonel Ridley," the ringleader asked, turning round to the greater ruffian with quite submissiveness.

"Well, Bill and boys," Monte Joe replied with evident condescension (as becomes a man who has dropped his fellow-citizens freely, in speaking to less prominent and respected townsmen), "I don't exactly say I agree with him, but there's a deal of truth in what he claims, any way. If you drop him here, nigger or no nigger, why that's murder. I don't say it ought to be; but such is the law of the United States, as at present unamended, and you've got to submit to it. Sooner or later, then, it's sure to get about east, in the cities or town's, that you boys murdered him. Well, after that, the press 'll get wind of it across yonder in England, and his friends 'll put the executive in motion, and they'll waste a year or two in diplomacy and trouble and exchanging notes; but, before they've done, they'll have the whole thing disinterred and string you up, as sure as the gospel—that's so, Bill. Better let the nigger keep his ring any way. You stick to accident boys and give 'em the sage-brush. It's every bit as sure and ten times safer from unpleasantness of any sort."

Chaparral Bill accepted the compromise. "It goes agin the grain," he said, with a regretful sigh, "to see a nigger go off with a ring like that right away to the sage-brush; but if you think it's best, Joe, it ain't a fellow-citizen's dooty to differ from you on a pint of etiquette—especially as you're a gentleman of known experience in them matters. Form yourselves in order, boys. That's so. We'll march 'em right away jest now to the frontier."

The boys fell in, and Ivan and Ali, seeing all resistance utterly useless before the face of such overpowering numbers, marched quietly down between their ranks, guarded on either side by loaded revolvers.

For three miles they marched on and down, away from the mountains, towards the Atlantic slope. As they went, the country grew drier and ever drier before them, for Eagle City lay almost on the very verge of the dreaded and waterless sage-brush desert.

At a point where the sage-brush began to deepen and thicken drearily around them, Chaparral Bill called a halt. The boys halted, Chaparral Bill pointed with his hand vaguely eastward. "That's the way to England," he said, with ironical emphasis. "Right over thar, you can't well miss it. You've only got to cross that belt of sage-brush thar, and—if you live—you'll reach the prairie. From the prairie, it's easy enough to rail east as far as New York, whence frequent communication exists by steamer with all the principal ports of Europe. Live it through, and you're all right. I guess the sage-brush is the only thing that'll trouble you. You know your road. Keep straight ahead, and in time—if you don't starve—you'll get to England. But if you attempt to turn up the trail by Eagle City and cross the Sierra, you'll find yourselves suffering from a severe form of Montana inflammatory disease—an ounce of lead in the brain—before to-morrow evening. Now march. Boys, we've got rid of the nigger and his friend. Good riddance. No blackguardism allowed in Eagle City. Give 'em a parting cheer, boys, and right about face for camp again afore this doggone desert wind chokes us!"

At the word, the boys drew their derringers, and fired in the air with a loud report. Then they turned in good order and marched homeward, leaving Ivan and Ali face to face by themselves with the lonely desert.

"What must we do?" Ali asked in despair.

Ivan took in the full terror of the situation better than the black man. "Three days' hard walking will take us across the sage-brush," he said with a groan, "if we can last out to do it. It's an awful walk, but for her sake we must try it. There's only one chance open for us—to walk as far and as hard as we can while we have got any life left in us. If once we can struggle across that ghastly plain—which no man ever yet crossed on foot—there's food and water at the other side of it."

CHAPTER XLI.

By this time the sun had risen high in the sky, and was pouring down upon their heads with all the torrid force which he always exerts in sandy desert regions. Mohammad Ali cast a glance at the horrible waste before them, and then turned appealingly to Ivan. "Wouldn't it be best," he said, "to lie by during the heat of the day, and push on boldly when the sun goes down? We could walk better, surely, after nightfall. They always do so in the Eastern deserts."

Ivan shook his head in emphatic dissent. "No," he answered with prompt decision. "I know my ground. That's all very well for men with supplies, but for us, nothing on earth could well be worse. At present, we've still the strength of food and drink left in our bodies. Thank heaven, they gave us breakfast before we started. We can do a good many miles on that, if we push on hard, before evening. But if we waited, we should set out on our tramp hungry and thirsty and half exhausted to start with. Let's use up our fresh strength to the best advantage while we've still got any. Ali, it's a desperate chance at the best. No human being—not even a red Indian, they say—ever yet crossed this desert on foot. If it were not for her, I'd never even try to cross it. A lingering death's all we can expect. It would be easier far to draw our revolvers and fire them simultaneously at one another's foreheads."

"There's no way round across the mountains?" Ali suggested tentatively.

Ivan waived his hand in utter despondency over the distant Sierra. "Eagle City blocks the only pass for two hundred miles in that direction," he answered. "There's desert everywhere, howling desert, till you reach the springs of the Arroyo river."

Three days' distance, without food or drink, through that waterless plain, and amid those dusty levels! They were both strong; they were both brave, but no human resolution, Mohammad Ali fancied, could ever enable them to face it out, with the hot wind blowing fiercely in their scorched faces, and the blinding alkali driving into their eyes from off the long vistas of that poisoned plain.

He stooped down and looked close at the baked and gaping ground. It consisted entirely of coarse sand shining white with salt and alkaline matter, and sparsely clothed with stunted tussocks of a dry brown grass in between the taller clumps of the olive-grey sagebrush. "It sometimes rains here," he cried, turning eagerly to Ivan. "See, this grass has once been fresh and green. I've seen its like in the Rajputana desert. There must be rain for grass to grow. Light showers must sometimes cover the ground here, too, or there wouldn't be any small vegetation among the desert brushwood."

Ivan shook his head gloomily. "No, no," he answered. "It *never* rains; absolutely never, from year's end to year's end. The grass grows, just here on the outskirts, in early spring, when the snow first melts on the lower slopes of the Sierra. But it's only for a week or two. After that it dies down entirely. The grass was over and done on the outer belt a clear month ago. Further on in the desert there's no herbage at all, dead or alive—nothing but sand and salt and wiry dry sage-brush. Don't look out for miracles, Ali. It's no good. Make up your mind for the worst at once. Our only hope is in pure hopelessness. There's not a single drop of water of any sort between this place where we now stand and the edge of the prairies."

Nevertheless they must tramp and try it. For Olwen's sake, it was all for Olwen.

Desert, desert—everywhere desert!

They walked on, always under the eye of that blazing sun, through a sea of sand, monotonous and illimitable. No shade, no change no relief anywhere. Nothing but sand, and salt, and dust, and sunshine, mile after mile, hour after hour, in wearisome repetition. And so like the sea in this, too, that as they moved they seemed to get no further on their way. The grey horizon, a mere thin line where the sweltering sand faded and melted into the sweltering sky, receded and receded ever dimly before them, without sign or landmark to measure the distance they had yet traversed. So they walked on and on and still on, moving slowly forward towards nowhere, in a straight line, marked out for them roughly by the direction of their own shadows. And above them, far behind, the white Sierras raised up towards heaven their spotless peaks of untrodden snow, as if to mock and torment them with the torture of Tantalus. That was their only possible measure of distance done. They looked back often towards those silent heights, that hardly seem to fall back into the distance at all, as the two unhappy and blinded men floundered helplessly on among the drifted dust heaps.

At the end of three hours' hard marching they came to a rock. It wasn't much of a rock. Anywhere else in the world they would hardly have noticed it, for it was a small rough boulder, standing scarce three feet above the surface of the plain, but it cast a shadow—a short shadow—the first shadow, except their own, they had seen since entering that awful wilderness. They sat down of one accord, without exchanging a word, in its scanty shade—the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land. Then Mohammad Ali drew forth from his pocket a small spirit flask. At its bottom lay half a wine-glass full of whiskey. It was all they had to keep them alive till they reached the prairie. He dropped four or five drops slowly, as if by measure, on his own tongue. Then he said to Ivan, "Take some, too. Let it lie in your mouth. It'll relieve you a little."

Ivan took it and did as he was bid. Even those few drops seemed strangely to revive their flagging courage. Small things make a wonderful difference in extremities. After a minute, Ivan rose to his feet. "Let's keep moving," he said; if we once stop we shall get stiff, and it'll be all the harder for us to start on our way again."

They started once more and walked on and on—ever onward steadily towards that receding horizon. The hours seemed so long that Ivan could hardly believe his watch when he took it out to look, had not their shadows unmistakably confirmed its message. They were not walking now; they were staggering and reeling. They rolled with the gait of drunken men. The desert seemed to take away their senses altogether. Mohammad Ali wiped his dry brow. In spite of the heat and the toil, they had ceased to perspire. It was the alkali, choking and clogging the pores of their skin. So much the better, that; there would be less evaporation. They might manage to hold up all the longer.

But the pain of moving their limbs was excruciating. Each movement felt like a wrench in the socket. No living thing seemed to in-

habit this ghastly and lonely waste of desert. Not even a lizard skulked among the scrub ; not even a beetle hid its hard wings among the dull grey foliage.

Still they marched and marched and marched, till evening came, and the sun set. Then the desert began to grow cooler around them. Ali's feet were sore to the bone, but Ivan walked on as stoutly as ever. The Englishman seemed to have the greater go. At last Ali gave in the first ; not that he would have been the first to give in, all things equal, but his shoes were thinner, not meant for Western wear, and his physical suffering was greater than Ivan's. "Shall we stop now," he said, "and put up for the night ? I suppose you mean to sleep somewhere, Royle."

"I mean to stop," Ivan answered with dry and almost inarticulate throat ; "but as to sleeping, I'm afraid that's quite another matter."

They sat down on a bare patch of sand, under the lee of a thick clump of sage-brush ; for the dust was driving before the light breeze, and would soon have buried them deep under its clouds anywhere in the open. They had not tasted food since morning, nor any drink except the few stinted drops of whiskey. A little spirit was still left at the bottom of the flask. They spared it for the present, fearing to waste their all on the first day out. Mohammad Ali looked hard in his friend's face. For a long time he seemed to debate within himself. Dare he speak, or would it anger the Englishman ? At last, with an effort, he leaned forward. "Ivan," he said, clutching his friend's arm convulsively, "there's one way out of it still, one way to get you back safe to Olwen. We needn't *both* die. If only——" And he hesitated.

With a strange start of recognition Ivan caught instinctively at the Indian's unspoken meaning, and drew back with a face of speechless horror. "Ali," he cried, "don't say so again. Don't breathe a word of it. Don't dream of it, Ali. Don't suggest the idea, even. You horrify and alarm me. Drop the notion at once. For God's sake ? I implore you, forget you ever even thought of it."

Ali held up his wrist temptingly before his face and stared at it hard. Then he drew his pocket-knife from his pocket and opened the blade with a quiet look of resolute determination. He put one finger on the left-hand pulse. He could feel it beating and throbbing wildly within there. "If you could only make up your mind to it, Royle," he cried, in a piteous voice. "It's our solitary hope. We can never, never make our way together across this endless desert. Why should both die when one would be sufficient. For *her* sake—for *her* sake. If you won't agree to it, we must both die. If you will, only one of us—me—need be sacrificed. Men have done it before, in the extremity of famine ; and the world has pardoned them on the plea of necessity. And in this case I give myself up willingly to assist your escape. You needn't even see it ; you can drink as a child drinks from its mother's breast. Suppose, by accident, now, the knife were to slip——"

With a wild cry of horror and affright wrung from his parched lips, Ivan Royle seized the Indian's light wrist in his strong hand, and, wresting from him the open knife, flung it with all his might in a great

arch a hundred yards off among the scrubby sage-brush. The emotion of the moment seemed to supply him as if by miracle with fresh strength and even to moisten his dry throat. "Ali," he cried, taking both the Indian's dusky hands in his, and gazing earnestly into his great black eyes, "don't, don't, for heaven's sake don't! You can't imagine how you shock and distress me. I know how you mean it—what noble and generous self-sacrifice it is; but I can't bear even to hear you speak of it. It revolts me through every nerve in my body. Ali, Ali, my dear, dear fellow, do spare me any more. This hunger and thirst and fatigue is bad enough. Don't make it worse for us by such horrible suggestions of impossible expedients."

Ali flung himself down in despair on the sand. "Then it's all up," he said. "Kismet, kismet. We shall never either of us get back alive. There's no hope. We must die where we stand. Two more such days are simply impossible."

Ivan crouched gloomily down by his side, and held the black man's hand in his own with infinite sympathy. Except in supreme moments of emergency or peril, men are seldom demonstrative to one another. But there comes a point at last in the fight for life at which the mutual reserve of men breaks down utterly, and, face to face with death or despair, they become tender as women in their care and solicitude for each other's feelings. The tears stood clear in Ivan's eyes. "Spare them, Ivan; for heaven's sake spare them!" Ali cried with an effort. "Every drop of moisture in your blood is life to you now." And as he spoke, his own tears rose brimming to the surface, and trickled slowly down his dark cheek. The men clasped each other's hands like two school girls, and lay down together side by side under the open heaven on the bare sand. The stars were coming out now overhead, one by one, and the desert was growing rapidly cooler and fresher. A great silence reigned upon the scene. Not a sound broke the ominous stillness of death; no hum of insects, no cry of birds, no distant confused murmur of life in any way. In the forest, night makes the stillness audible; in the arid sand-wastes, night makes the stillness profounder and more appalling than ever. For leagues around, the desert lay dead and mute in the dim starlight, and the sand and the sage-brush stretched away illimitable towards the grey horizon on every side, with those two desolate and footsore creatures huddled together, alone and helpless, an oasis of humanity in its very midst.

"Good night," Ivan said, turning round on his side for pure weariness.

"Good night," Ali answered, half conscious even then in his own mind of the bitter mockery of that conventional salutation, and closing his eyes with painful effort to keep out the dust of the all-pervading alkali.

CHAPTER XLII.

STRANGE to say, they both slept, slept soundly, and never stirred till morning had begun to whiten the eastern horizon. They woke with a start, to find themselves once more in the midst of the desert. Pure fatigue had made them fall asleep without food or drink ; but when they raised themselves on their elbows and stared around, their mouths were white and dry and leathery, and their swollen tongues could hardly utter a single word for want of internal moisture. Mohammad Ali drew the precious flask lovingly from his pocket and handed it, with a gesture of his hands, to Ivan. Ivan dropped four drops on his wrinkled tongue, and passed it wearily back again. Ali nodded, and screwing down the lid with jealous care, was just replacing it untasted in his pocket when Ivan checked him. "Stop," he cried, rolling the wretched pittance of spirit round his parched mouth. "Why, what on earth are you doing, Ali ? You haven't taken a drop yourself yet."

Ali nodded a second time and shook his head. He couldn't speak—his tongue refused to utter a sound—but he drew a note-book and pencil hastily from his pocket and wrote down on the page in a hurried hand. "I don't need any. I will go on with you as long as I last. But it doesn't matter so much about *me*. The important point is to get *you* back in safety to England."

Ivan seized him once more almost roughly by the arm. "Ali," he cried, with passionate vehemence, "if you talk like this you'll drive me mad. Whatever it is, we must share it together. You must take four drops yourself, as I did ; and if we die, we shall die in company, by one another's sides. You shall never leave me, and I will never leave you. We'll struggle through, shoulder to shoulder." He took the flask with a wrench from the unresisting black man, and, unscrewing it once more, held it up to his friend's mouth.

Ali accepted the proffered drops with his hands crossed in mute resignation. "Let us go Ivan," he said, as he rolled them round and found speech again. "We can walk better before the sun's up. When it's high in the sky and burning overhead, we can rest again in the shelter of the sage-brush."

They rose and shook themselves mechanically like dogs. The gleam in the east fixed the points of the compass for them, and they began to walk towards the unrisen sun. Sleep had rested and refreshed Ivan ; Ali, more wiry and enduring, but physically slighter, felt less relieved by that spell of empty slumber. He had not so much to fall back upon in the way of reserve, and repair was wanting. Moreover, his feet ached terribly. But he said not a word of complaint to discourage his companion. Patient and silent, he plodded on.

At last, about eleven o'clock, the heat became intense and unendurable, and Ali could hardly move one weary limb slowly before the other. Yet he went on walking in a mechanical way, though his legs felt as if they did not belong to him, but were a sort of appendage or artificial joint he could stretch out still by a violent effort somehow in front of him. He was wondering in his own heart how much longer he could hold out against this terrible exertion, when suddenly, to his great surprise, Ivan without one word sat down, or rather collapsed, on the bare sand, and, burying his face in his two hands, rocked himself to and fro wildly in a perfect agony of impotent fatigue.

Ali drew the flask for the last time reluctantly from his pocket. A few precious drops still remained at the bottom. He drained them fast down Ivan's throat. It was their last taste of food or drink. They might starve now in the midst of the desert. All hope was gone. Death stared them in the face. Ivan's collapse was sudden and absolute. Like many strong men, he held out long, but when he failed he failed at once and far more abjectly than his weaker companion. He flung himself flat on his back in the eye of the sun, and waited for death with the stoical resignation of fatigue and despair.

A man takes a long time to starve in a temperate climate, when he sits still and does nothing. But in that warping desert, and after that long forced march, death would doubtless be somewhat more merciful to them. They might live through the day, and even the night, in silent misery, but to-morrow's hot sun would surely do for them. There was hope in that—for to such hope were they now reduced. All chance of saving Ivan for Olwen was gone for ever. To starve as fast as possible was all they could look forward to.

Starve! They must starve! But why starve at all? When one stands so close to a terrible death, why shrink from availing one's self of the means for shortening one's torment? Englishmen are brought up to treat suicide as a crime, to cling to the last chance of bare life as an actual duty. The Moslem knows no such theory of right. To him, a moment comes at last when suicide is not only not wrong but almost imperative. Ali took out his revolver from his pocket, and toyed with the cartridges. A wild thought flashed across his mind once more. Suppose he were to hold it to his forehead and fire? Ivan, who would not consent to—to his proposed compromise—as things stood, might, perhaps, when he saw him lying there dead and shattered before him, steel up his courage to the point of——

With another wild dash, Ivan, opening his eyes, snatched away the revolver, and buried it deep in his own pockets. Horror and fear gave him tongue once more. "Ali," he cried, "I know what you mean. Don't dream of such things. It's quite, quite useless. Let us die here quietly. I could sleep with fatigue. Don't weary me more. I shall soon be insensible." And he groaned aloud. "Let me die in peace," he moaned out at last, "by promising me not to try any such desperate remedies."

Ali stifled a groan himself and answered solemnly, "Ivan, I promise." They lay a long while silent once more, in the speechless misery of a

last despair ; and then, after two hours, Ivan again opened his eyes. "I've slept," he said, almost inarticulately. "I've dreamt, too—horrible dreams. I shall die soon. Let's take your note-book and write a few words. Somebody may find our bodies some time or other. A few words to let Olwen know we died for her."

"No," Ali answered, quite firmly and clearly. "Let us write nothing. It is better not. Let us leave no record to say who we were or how we died. Olwen will never know then. All they will say in England is that we disappeared in the Sierra and were never heard of. Don't vex her with the knowledge of how we died, Ivan."

Ivan turned over listlessly on his side once more and groaned again. He could not speak, but he felt in his heart that the black man's was the nobler and truer impulse.

Day wore on, and the sun, after pouring down upon them hour upon hour with merciless intensity, began at last to sink in the heavens. Both men had relapsed now into a kind of dreary, weary, comatose condition ; they lay on their backs dying in the desert ; they saw and felt and remembered nothing. Evening came on, but still they lay there. The desert stretched white and bare around them. The sagebrush crackled and whispered as it shrank with the change from heat to cold. A strange shiver passed through the sand. A sort of low hum arose from the warped branches. Then a pause came. Something shook them vigorously as they lay on the bare earth. A rumbling noise passed through the ground. The noise awoke Mohammad Ali once more. He raised himself feebly on his elbows and gazed around. It was dark now, and growing quite chilly.

Deserts are always cold at night. The heat accumulated during the day radiates off rapidly as soon as the sun is gone, through the absence of watery vapour in the air ; and by two o'clock in the morning the cold is often as intense as the heat was sweltering and unendurable at noontide. Ali shivered with the change of temperature. As he did so, some sound seemed to strike his ear. He listened awhile. Surely, surely, he heard something ! He put his hand to his ear and listened again. Yes, yes, he was sure of it. No European ear would have caught a sound ; but Ali's quick Arab hearing seized upon it at once with Eastern acuteness. It was a noise of something stealing and trickling down a distant ravine. It was—it was, the murmur of water !

He sprang to his feet in great joy. The very sound of its plash, caught dimly in his ear, seemed to revive and invigorate him as if by magic. The cold, too, gave him fresh strength for the moment. He moistened his lips with a terrible effort, and cried aloud to the unconscious Ivan, "Water ! Water !"

Ivan opened his eyes slowly. "Where ?" he gasped, and closed them quickly again.

"Within a mile or two," Ali answered, almost gay with the prospect, "I can hear it flowing. Get up, get up—do try, dear Ivan. If only we can reach it, it'll be all right yet."

Ivan let his head fall back once more like a stone. "Not ten steps

further," he murmured, "for life itself. I'm dead beat. Let me die, Ali."

Ali stooped down and laid his hand on his brow. It was hot with fever. "Royle," he said, "lie still by yourself then. See here, I'll tie my handkerchief to the tallest bit of brush anywhere about. That'll do for a mark when I've found the water. I'll go in search of it, and bring you a flaskful."

Without another word—for even words were precious now—Mohammad Ali tied his white handkerchief to a straggling top of sage-brush a hundred yards off, and staggered forth, weary and footsore, but animated once more by fresh hope and a wild desire, in the direction from which he thought the sound proceeded. The moon was rising, a tiny crescent, from the desert as he went, and a little light served just to guide his stumbling footsteps. Over the crusted alkali he made his way blindly across the dead plain. After ten minutes struggling he halted and put his hand to either ear alternately. Oh, joy! The plash of water fell distinctly on his ear. He summoned up all his courage, with tottering limbs, and walked on once more. He was drawing near to it. Nearer and nearer. The ravine lay black in the shadow before him.

A spring from the mountains must run down its midst. He stumbled along and looked down over the brink, an abrupt brink, like the cliffs in Cornwall. Hurrah, hurrah! There was water, water. He could see it glistening dimly below—a long series of cataracts, in a tiny stream, bubbling and gurgling down that long dry valley. Without one moment's hesitation, buckling himself to the task, he began to clamber, hand-over-hand, down the wall-like sides of smooth rock that hemmed it in, trusting for foothold to the ledges or holes, and clinging for support to the stems of sage-brush that here and there had rooted themselves deep in the weathered crannies.

Half way down, a treacherous stump of the dry brush misled his feet. He tried the next with a violent struggle. It broke short. Mohammad Ali felt himself slipping. He clutched for support at the tops of the jutting and overhanging sage-brush. The dry twigs snapped off like tinder. He was falling, falling. Dizzy and giddy, clinging as he went to bush after bush of the sapless stuff, he rolled or fell some thirty feet down, lighting at last on hands and knees upon the naked platform of rock at the bottom. He had checked his fall, but only just checked it. His palms and fingers were horribly torn, his clothes were rent, and his leg was bruised and bleeding freely from the knee to the ankle. Stunned by the fall, he lay there still and half-conscious for a moment, while a hideous vision floated before his mind's eye. He saw Ivan lying, dead and lonely, on the bare desert behind where he had left him, and himself lying, dead and lonely, too, almost within arm's reach of the blessed stream that purled and bubbled audibly beside him.

Then his eyes closed, and he lost consciousness for ten minutes.

When they opened again the sound of the gurgling brook at his side, louder than before, once more revived him. He raised himself on his hands and knees and crawled, or rather dragged his fainting body, close

to the edge. As he neared it, he was aware of a curious sense of being back in London. Something of civilization seemed to strike his mind. It was an odour, a familiar odour, he fancied, that aroused the feeling. He associated it, somehow, with an ironmonger's shop in a street at Hampstead. Was he wandering in his mind, or was it the smell of a lamp? Surely, surely, this must be Hampstead. Ah, horror! He bent at last above the limpid brook, that shone and glittered and ran silver in the moonlight. It was well within reach—he could taste it now. But it wasn't water. It had mocked his search. He scooped up a handful in his hollow palm, and held it towards his lips. With a sickening sense of utter despair he flung it from him wildly again. The whole truth flashed across his weary and maddened brain in an awful awakening. The stream he had risked so much to reach was running, not with water, but with pure petroleum!

CHAPTER XLIII.

THAT hideous and utter frustration of all his hopes sent Ali back again into unconsciousness once more. Faint and weak from loss of blood, weary with walking, climbing, and crawling, sick at heart with hope deferred, nay, rather, defeated and brought to naught—he gave himself up at last to final despair, and took willing refuge in the arms of death or insensibility. For hours he lay there in the stupor of fatigue, like one fast asleep, without turning or waking. When he opened his eyes dreamily again, it was broad daylight, and a smart breeze was blowing sharply down the narrow canyon from the mountain region.

He sat up, amazed, and gazed with vacant eyes around him. On either side, black walls of rock rose perpendicular to the narrow chink of sky overhead; so perpendicular that he wondered within himself how he could ever have dreamed in the dark last night of clambering down them so boldly and successfully. To scale them back again would be absolutely impossible, for the sage-brush failed near the bottom of the cliff, where the rock stood naked, sharp, and sheer as a wall, so that no foothold was anywhere afforded for the first two or three yards of perpendicular surface. But to get up, under any circumstances, would have been simply out of the question, as things now stood. It was at least possible to walk down the canyon. He would try that while his legs could carry him.

Raising himself with difficulty to his feet, Mohammad Ali gazed awestruck down that narrow gap between the rearing mountain of rock that towered unscalable on either hand. Only a distance of some forty or fifty feet separated the opposite walls of the gorge from one another. That ravine had clearly not been worn by the existing stream; a wretched little dribbling thread of petroleum could never have excavated so deep and wide and precipitous a gorge, even with

the illimitable bank of geological time to draw upon for the process. It was the dry bed of some vast but now diverted river.

The canyon was covered at irregular intervals by long white piles of mouldering matter which Ali at first imagined to be mere heaps of drifted or concreted alkali. But looking closer at the nearest of them all, some ten yards off, he saw to his surprise it was really bones—dried and pulverized and decaying bones—the skeletons of starved and thirsty beasts that had fallen and perished there in the extremity of famine. He dragged himself along feebly to the first in order. The greater part of the skeleton had crumbled away into white dust, but the horns remained untouched in any way, and from them, as well as from the great thigh bones and massive vertebræ he saw at once that the animal to which they belonged had been a prairie buffalo. Had it fallen from the top or wandered up the bed of the stream he wondered? Clearly the last, for the skeletons all occupied the central line of the dry, waterless ravine, where they had staggered and fallen, as Ivan staggered and fell yesterday, weary and thirsty and blinded with the alkali. Ali's heart gave one wild pulsation of hope once more at the implication of that undeniable fact. They had staggered up thus far, he felt sure, from the prairie.

Then the prairie itself could not after all be so very far distant. Perhaps he might still manage, for Ivan's sake, to reach it.

And yet it was far enough for even the buffaloes to have failed and fallen with thirst by the way. How, then, could they two ever hope to reach it?

He crawled on idly, he knew not why, down the baking canyon, for every step cost him agonies of pain, and examined the next heap with useless curiosity. It was somewhat fresher and newer than the last; the bones in this case were almost all intact, and Ali's trained anatomical eye noticed instinctively that the smaller ones were without exception missing. He knew what that meant. The thighs and backbones and ribs were there, but the skull was broken, and the minor tail and neck bones, as well as the digits, were visibly gnawed by teeth of animals. Beasts of prey had followed and devoured the fallen buffalo.

Then the buffalo had been pursued up the canyon from the prairie by wolves or coyotes. So much was clear. Perhaps, after all, since the coyotes could reach this point in pursuit of prey, the prairie was nearer than he at first imagined.

Further down the gap, as he looked ahead, a still more entire skeleton lay close by the bubbling stream of petroleum. The Indian dragged himself painfully along once more till he was nearly abreast of it by the side of the stream. As he gazed he saw a sight that thrilled him afresh with a profound thrill of hope and expectation. The bones were bare and white and clear of flesh—licked clean evidently by a pack of coyotes—but there were visible traces of red blood scattered upon the sand that lay around them. That was, indeed a clue to go upon. The buffalo had but recently been killed and eaten.

Mohammad Ali carefully examined the bare fragments. The small

bones had been crunched and cracked, and in many cases eaten, but the larger ones lay still quite fresh and unbroken in their original positions. An inarticulate cry burst wildly from his lips. He opened his mouth and cried with all his might, but no sound of any sort issued from his organs; his throat and larynx were too dry and parched for voice or sound at all to frame itself. With the famished rush of a starving man, Mohammad Ali fell fiercely upon the skeleton. It was food, food—food in abundance. He lifted one great thigh-bone high in the air, and dashed it shivering on the naked rock beside him. The bone broke into a dozen fragments, and Ali, going down on hands and knees, and crammed the raw marrow that spurted forth, mad with excitement, into his dry throat, in all the wild joy of rescue from starvation. There was food, food—food—for both of them; food and drink, for the marrow was still soft and full of juice—the cool liquid giving him heart again to look for Ivan. He ate it ravenously and then broke another. Famine reduces us all to the level of the savage. Bone after bone he smashed against the rock in eager haste, and swallowed the raw fat with all the frantic madness of extreme hunger. At last, when the first edge of his appetite was somewhat appeased, he lay back and rested.

If Ivan had been there Ali would have thought first of Ivan. But the one point now was to recruit his strength sufficiently to enable him to return to his fallen companion. Marrow was precious; but even marrow itself—worth ten thousand times its weight in gold just then—must be lavished like water—like water, indeed! oh, the irony of language!—for Ivan and Olwen. He took off his socks, and rubbed his blistered and swollen feet above and below with the priceless ointment. What a sense of relief the rich fat gave him! He rubbed it lightly over his face and hands and neck, all sore and smarting with the warping wind and the astringent alkali. It soothed and quieted the pain at once.

After a while, as life and strength returned, he began breaking more small bones, and filling the flask with their oily liquor. Happily, too, it was not all oil; a great part of it was fresh animal juice—the best beef tea, in fact, naturally extracted. As soon as the flask was quite full, he went on to break the remaining large bones, and empty the contents into the hollow of his hat, for he fortunately wore a round pith helmet. Starving men are not dainty. Food and drink to recruit their strength sufficiently for crossing the rest of the desert—that was the one great thing now to be considered. A hat in such circumstances is quite good enough. If only he could anyhow get back to Ivan! But the more he looked at those perpendicular black walls of rock, the more hopeless did the attempt to scale them seem. He might conceivably have got up empty-handed; but with the helmet full of marrow to clog his arms, never, never, infallibly never.

Necessity, however, is the mother of invention. As Ali lay on the naked rock and gazed up listlessly at the narrow chink of grey-blue sky stretched overhead, it suddenly occurred to him with a burst of thought that he might first climb up himself and then draw up the

helmet after him. He had no string, indeed, but string can be made ; a man with a shirt on need never lack for cord on occasion. He pulled off his upper garments, and taking off his shirt, tore the body and sleeves into long and narrow shreds of calico. These he fastened together with knots into a rude rope, and suspended the helmet from the end by three tags, gipsy-kettle fashion, so that it might be pulled up after him without danger of spilling. If only he could scale the bluffs himself, now, all would yet be well. As the food he had eaten began to course more freely through his veins, he regained his usual indomitable courage and energy.

Picking his way cautiously up the canyon once more, between the rocks and boulders that strewed its dry bed, where the stream of petroleum ran in a slender thread down the midst, he reached at last a point above where the rock was riven in a lateral crack on one side, and a practicable ascent might perhaps be ventured. He laid down the helmet with care on the rock, and tying the end of his calico rope to a button-hole of his coat, he began cautiously to scale this lateral opening. As he did so, he noticed to his immense surprise that the rent by which he was mounting was quite new—a rift in the rock evidently cloven by some internal force of very recent date indeed. At the moment, he attached no importance to this fact. He merely recognized in a vague way that it must have something to do with the newness of the petroleum stream, whose very recent origin he had observed earlier by the indications in the central valley. But when a man is climbing a precipice for dear life, with his friend lying possibly dead in the desert before him, he has hardly time or inclination, one may well believe, for geological speculation. Ali only noticed, in a careless kind of way, that the cleft was new and quite clean cut, because, being nowhere weathered, it afforded him the easier and safer foothold on its sharp ledges ; while, on the other hand, no friendly sage-brush by which to hold on yet grew spontaneous in the fresh cracks, so that he tore his fingers more than once with the glass-like angles of the new and sharp-cut crystalline basalt fractures.

At last, however, by almost superhuman efforts of Eastern agility he gained the top, then leaning over the edge, and pulling at his improvised calico rope, he lifted the helmet carefully to the top, and, to his profound joy, succeeded at last in raising it the whole way without once spilling it. The absence of sage-brush, which had proved so dangerous an obstacle in climbing, turned out a distinct advantage here ; for the helmet or the cord would have got hopelessly entangled and confused on its way up among the branching bushes. But when at length, all peril over, he stood upon the summit, safe and sound, though bruised and bleeding from a hundred scratches, with that precious stock of fat held securely in his hands, and the liquid beef tea clasped hard in his coat pocket, he felt the swelling pride of a successful general who has brought his men in good order through a dangerous retreat from some untenable position. An army, they say, fights upon its stomach. Mohammad Ali, engaged in bitter conflict with the wily desert, his ancestral foe, felt the full force of that profound maxim as he gazed

with long and loving looks at the luscious lumps of round raw marrow. Fat without bread or meat is poor food, indeed, in a Belgravian dining-room ; but one learns to appreciate its sterling good points after two days' starvation and drought in an alkali desert.

And now came the final absorbing question, how to find his way back to Ivan. That was not so easy a problem by any means as it looked at first sight. Mohammad Ali had a general idea of the direction in which he had tottered and staggered last night to the brink of the ravine ; that sense, too, ran innate in his Arab blood ; but he couldn't see the handkerchief tied to the bush anywhere ; and, indeed, it began to strike him now that a white handkerchief formed but a poor landmark in the midst of all that white alkaline upland. But still he toiled on, in the general direction where he thought Ivan might finally be found, on the bare chance of spotting at last that fluttering white rag upon the grey sage-bushes. He would have walked till he dropped in search of Ivan ; it was all on earth he had now to live for.

He wandered on a long way, halloaing now and again at the top of his voice, and gazing around him for ever eagerly, but saw no sign of Ivan anywhere. How he wished he had his revolver in his pocket with him ; he might have fired it off in the air to attract his friend ; and Ivan would then have answered, if answer he could ; but Ivan had wrested it from him last night—that "last night" that seemed whole weeks and years away already. No echo came to all his cries, and he was nearly worn out with tramping, and searching when he at last espied on a distant bush the long looked-for handkerchief of his earnest prayers. It fluttered still upon the big clump of sage ; and a dark object lay stretched at full length upon the hot and baking sand beside it—ominously still and flat, the object. With a sinking heart, Mohammad Ali approached it.

He struggled up to the spot, bare-headed, under that fierce sun, with the helmet in his hands, and saw as he neared it a sight that froze for a moment the very blood in his veins after all those manifold terrors and perils. Ivan Royle's body lay helpless on its back upon the bare ground, in the full blaze of the scorching sun, with gaunt and pallid face upturned to the sky, and eyes staring wide with ghastly glaziness in the face of heaven. The look of those eyes, open but sightless, on the bare desert, moved Mohammad Ali at last to floods of tears. Ivan was dead, then, and all was up. He had come too late. It was useless now. The game was played ; the hand was lost. He might lie down at last himself and die in peace. There was nothing left any longer to fight about.

Olwen ! Olwen ! Poor hopeless Olwen ! What would she do without either of them, he wondered.

CHAPTER XLIV.

He flung himself down, cross-legged, on the desert soil. He, the son of the desert, could bear its hardships, and ride them down as a slim ship rides down by her very lightness the heavy seas of the broad Atlantic. But Ivan Royle, stouter of build, yet less wiry and tenacious of frame for all that, had sunk before them as a great galleon sinks and founders under her own weight in the trough of the ocean during some wild and frantic tropical cyclone. Mohammad Ali bent over him, breathless. The Englishman's eyes were open wide, and his jaw had fallen as in the throes of death. The tongue within protruded, dry like leather. He seemed emaciated and desiccated by the warping wind already. So strange a change was miraculous in the time. The Indian knelt down and listened at his heart. Oh, Allah ! Allah ! it was beating yet ! There was still life ! there was still hope ! The machine was at work, however feebly. It needed only fresh fuel for the furnace to set it going anew. Mohammad Ali, wild with joy, unscrewed the top of the flask and dropped a few drops of the precious liquor upon the parched tongue. Ivan's throat clicked conclusively, and swallowed them down with an eager gulp. Thank God ! thank God ! he might yet live. He could feel, he could swallow. Ali might save him after all for Olwen.

Drop by drop, the devoted black man poured the precious liquor down his friend's throat ; and slowly, as the moisture and food revived him, Ivan Royle's eyes began to close, and then, after a long and doubtful interval, to open again with life and vision once more restored to them. All day long Ali watched and tended him ; hour by hour he came to himself again ; and by nightfall Ivan had recovered marvellously. Of course, he was still very weak and footsore ; but the natural beef tea and the rich fat gave him strength rapidly, beyond anything he could have conceived of as possible ; and, by the cool of the evening, he was once more in a condition to renew for a while their painful march. By that time they had eaten the greater part of their little store of provender ; but they felt sure the prairie could not be far distant, and they hoped against hope that they might still reach it.

"Let's try the canyon," Ali suggested, as they were preparing to start. "The rock there would be easier than this horrible sand ; and there's no alkali underfoot at least, though it blows about, of course, in the air. Besides, the very sound of what seems like water trickling over the stones does one good to hear. It makes one think one's nearing England."

Slowly and painfully, picking their way with care over the burning alkaline soil, they approached the edge of the deep canyon while it was still dusk, and scrambled down by the same practicable cleft which

Ali had chosen for the ascent that morning. The gap was wider now, Ali noticed to his surprise, in the same casual way as he had remarked its freshness and newness on his first visit ; and even Ivan, enfeebled and weary as he was, looking close at the sharp and jagged edges, remarked to his friend as they reached the bottom, " That's new earthquake work ; I know it's character well by sight. The mountain earthquakes always rend the basalt like that. This one seems to be quite recent. It must have been done within forty-eight hours."

On the dry bed of the canyon, where they walked along, everything now seemed safe enough. The rock under foot was solid and smooth, though so strewn with boulders from time to time that they picked their way among them in places with difficulty. They were walking indeed, on the abandoned course of some mighty river which had worn the basalt smooth as a pavement, and cut down its channel as straight and naked as a deep railway cutting through high sandstone hills. At first the twilight and starlight alone served to render the deep gloom of that profound gorge into darkness visible. They could just distinguish the great dim rift of heaven over head, and pick their way, more by groping than by sight, among the huge boulders that strewed their path under foot.

After four hours' weary march, as Ivan was beginning to grow almost faint and weak with fatigue again, they found themselves suddenly in new surroundings—the canyon debouched, without warning or gradation, on a flat and level shelf of open tableland. They emerged at once upon a wide plain. Behind them a terrace of bare black rock rose high like a wall, the terrace through whose midst the canyon was excavated. In front a second terrace stretched for a quarter of a mile or less, and then descended by a similar step into the prairie below. The whole country, in fact, for miles around was composed of successive flights or ledges of rocks, each of which ended abruptly in a steep precipice, while the last abutted at length on the general level of the Mississippi basin. The ledge at which they had now arrived was the final step of that vast natural scale or flight of mountain stairs ; below them, at its end, in dim perspective lay the prairie lowland—the goal of their utmost endeavour.

That sight once more revived their flagging hopes. Within a quarter of a mile of them lay the longed-for prairie. Where there is prairie there there is grass ; and where there is grass, there there is water. Yet, even so, they could push on no further without a short spell of rest and sleep. They grasped one another's hands once more in fervent thankfulness, and lay down silently on the bare rock to recruit their shattered strength for that final effort. All might now be well. The desert was done ; the open prairie lay broad in front of them.

When they woke again it was nearly sunrise, and hope streamed from the lighted east against the grim gaunt walls of rearing rock behind them. The two men rose from their bare couch and journeyed on, hungry and thirsty once more, to the precipitous edge of that last plateau.

Weary and footsore as they were, it took them more than half an

hour to cover the quarter mile that lay between themselves and the last ledge. But when they reached it, from its brink they looked down with delight once more upon green grass and bright flowers. The country must be sometimes, at least, visited with rains, or herbage like that could never grow upon it. A few minutes now would bring them out of their trouble. They were fairly free from the rainless belt. They stood on the verge of the lush green prairie. Hurrah ! hurrah ! Their troubles were over. That night they should sleep on the grassy prairie.

Mohammad Ali clutched his friend's arm eagerly. "See, Ivan, see !" he cried in wild excitement. "What's that down there ?—do you see yonder, in the valley of the stream we've followed from the canyon ?"

Ivan shaded his eyes with his hand wearily, for the sun was now rising, and they were looking due eastward. Its beams fell upon a group of white objects that filled the dale in the near foreground. Ivan's lips trembled for joy. "A town ! a town !" he cried with tremulous eagerness.

Yes, yes, it was a town—a real town. No doubt about that. A town with all genuine civilized appliances. Not a mere lodge in the wilderness, like the mining camps ; not a den of thieves like Eagle City ; but a regular town with streets and houses, and church, and public buildings—all of them wooden, indeed, but some of them far from unpretentious in their way,—a town of the best far-prairie order. It was an oil-well city, Ivan saw at a glance ; for the place was full of the big gaunt derricks that always accompany the petroleum industry. Nay, there was even a branch railroad or tramway across the plain beyond ; they were again well in touch with advanced civilization. That railway must somewhere join the main line of the Union Pacific ; it must convey the oil from the flourishing outpost they beheld before them to the warehouses of Omaha or to Salt Lake City.

Saved, saved, they were saved at last ! In an hour or two more they should rest on a bed—they should eat and drink among civilized and kind-hearted fellow-creatures. The revulsion was almost too much for their shattered nerves. It blinded and chilled them with excess of happiness.

An oil-well settlement on the brink of the prairie ! How lucky they had followed the canyon and the petroleum stream ! The petroleum stream must supply the town with the oil for export. And yet—

A strange doubt flitted before them.

How curious, since the stream was there, flowing free to all, there should be all those derricks and all that complicated expensive machinery for pumping and raising the oil to the surface. For a moment the apparent contradiction of fact startled and puzzled Mohammad Ali. Then he suddenly remembered the newness of the stream, and the obvious evidence of recent earthquake action. Till the day before yesterday, the bed of the canyon had long been dry. The oil had only begun to flow from its subterranean bed after the shock of earthquake. Doubtless the derricks would now be useless. Nature herself was pumping up the oil under altered circumstances.

As they climbed down, step by step, with infinite fatigue and parched throats, longing for that promised treat of water, Mohammad Ali kept his eyes fixed all the time upon the houses in front of them. Suddenly a cry of wild surprise burst from his lips. It was a cry of fresh and terrible doubt.

"What's the matter?" Ivan asked, astonished at this unexpected and curious revulsion from their supreme delight of the last few moments.

Ali clutched his friend's arm a second time nervously. "Matter!" he cried. "Oh, Ivan, Ivan! Why, what's the meaning of this? can you tell me? There's no smoke coming from any of the chimneys."

Ivan gazed hard and then turned round on him incredulously. "It must be too early," he said, with a falling face. "None of the fires are lighted by this time."

Mohammad Ali shook his head in unspeakable alarm. "No, no!" he cried; "that won't account for it. Some people would be up and stirring long ago. There's always fire soon after sunrise. I see what it is, Ivan. It's a deserted city!"

The tin-covered roofs glistened and shone in the dazzling sun; the prairie smiled with grass and flowers below them; the distant view shimmered in the morning light; but it was with heavy hearts that those two weary and thirsty men turned again to descend at last upon the wished-for level.

Their dream was gone. It was an unpeopled desert!

CHAPTER XLV.

At home in England, the red cliffs of Polperran, that summer morning, rose above the clear green pools at their base, as jagged and rosy and beautiful as ever. Nature obstinately refuses to suit herself to our moods. She was joyous and bright and clear that day, as if Harry Chichele had never died. Seeta Mayne, wandering along the cliffs by the zigzag path, with Olwen at her side, looked out to sea and sighed and wondered; for the sea was banded green and purple; and Olwen—Olwen was almost herself again.

But all the world was dull and grey to Seeta.

"Mohammad Ali has been gone a very long time," Olwen murmured quietly, as she sat down on a rock upon the edge of the cliff—that cliff where she had once sat so happy and blithe with the Harry that was not and had never been. "I wish he was back again. I do like Ali. He's such a nice fellow. Of course, I love you too, dearly, you know darling; but I can't say how it is, in these last days—ever since that, you know—whatever it was—I somehow feel as if I could never

have people enough at my side, as if I wanted every one of all my friends always about me, and quite, quite close to me, to guard and protect me."

"Ever since *what*?" Seeta ventured to ask, turning her eyes full upon her friend, with that great hunger still gnawing forever at her broken heart.

"Ever since *then*," Olwen answered, hesitating. "I don't remember what it all was, of course, Seeta; but I somehow recollect in a sort of dim uncertain way that something terrible once happened—when I was first ill, you remember—before we all came back home here to Polperran. Why did we ever leave Polperran at all, I wonder? Why did we all go and live in that dreadful frightening London?"

She looked up into Seeta's face with a strange, anxious, inquiring glance—a glance that showed at once how all her mind was puzzled and clouded with an inexplicable mystery. She was trying hard in her futile way to pull together the threads of that obliterated passage in her shattered life. But the great blot and gap in her brain still seemed to intervene and blur it all. There was a terrible and persistent lacuna somewhere. All the threads of memory appeared to hang together and cohere perfectly, till she came to that great central fact of all; and there, her whole previous life escaped her utterly, and vanished into a blank of infinite misgivings. Thread after thread led back to it separately; the blank was interwoven with the whole knitted fabric of her mind and being; but by a rare, though by no means unique, accident, she had recovered sense and thought and memory elsewhere, while that central fact and keystone of the whole of her nature remained involved for her still in impenetrable mystery.

Olwen looked at her, with tears, again. "Seeta," she cried piteously, "explain it all to me. I know you know. I know you could tell me. I'm sure, if you did, I should recall it all. Seeta, dear Seeta, do, do explain it to me!"

Seeta trembled from head to foot. The memory of Harry seemed to her so precious, so earnest, so sacred almost, that she could scarcely bear to talk of him to the wife who had clean forgotten all about him. She only murmured in a low voice, "It would do you no good, dear. You can't understand. Oh, Olwen, it grieves me to think about it."

Olwen sat down upon a jutting rock, and began to cry bitterly like the child she was. "Seeta," she said again, "do, do try to tell me. I know I ought always to be crying and grieving. I know there's something I ought to be sad about. I feel it myself, and I know it's expected of me. And, somewhere in my heart, I have such a terrible pain, a pain as if my life were all broken and shattered. I remember there was somebody or something somewhere I used to think and dream a great deal about; and yet it's all gone right from me. What can I do? How can I remember it?"

Seeta's hand shook like an aspen leaf, and her breast heaved and fell convulsively. She was sure Mohammad Ali would not have disapproved, and yet she couldn't help suggesting an idea to Olwen.

"Darling," she said, leaning over her like a sister, "don't you remember anything—about Harry."

At the word, Olwen grew deadly pale. She didn't cry; she didn't faint; she didn't speak. She remembered nothing—nothing evidently. The name recalled to her, not her love, her loss, her married life, her maiden fancy—but the great terror of the room in Queen Anne's Road, where she had seen and heard that appalling vision. She shrank back with a sudden gesture of fear and alarm. Something within her seemed to shake her soul to its inmost foundations. The blank arose again, in bodily form, blanker and emptier and more mysterious than ever. She gazed around with a vacant stare, and held out her arms as if to keep herself from falling. Then she rose, and tottered to the edge of the cliff. The solid earth seemed to melt between her feet. She staggered and fell, as if the entire fabric of visible and tangible things had utterly failed her. Seeta caught her, trembling, in her arms, or she would have fallen where she stood over the edge of the precipice.

"My darling," the elder woman cried, repentant of the trial to which she had put the shrinking girl, "I ought never to have told you! I ought never to have tried you! But for my own love's sake——" and she paused, terrified at her own rash outspokenness.

But Olwen sat down again, as in a serious relapse, and folded her hands resignedly before her. She sat there long, and Seeta, terrified, hardly dared to speak or to rouse her from her lethargy. At last she rose of herself to go. Seeta held her hand tight in her own. They walked back in silence to the gate of the rectory. Then, with a sudden reminder, Olwen smiled. "Do you think Ivan Royle will come back soon?" she asked in her simple, childish voice, as if nothing had happened.

A fierce revulsion of feeling seized on Seeta. She rushed into the house, and leaving Olwen to her own mind, flung herself down on the drawing-room sofa, with eyes and eyelids all too hard and dry for weeping. It was slow torture, this sight of Olwen's incomprehensible terror and forgetfulness. That Harry should have been blotted out of her brain entirely was in itself quite horrible enough; but that she should speak and think of Ivan Royle instead, with such an abiding affection, was ten thousand times worse—it was sheer blasphemy.

The *Times* lay open on the table by her side. Her aching eyes, too hot and bursting for the relief of tears, fell upon it accidentally, without marking the words, "Ivan Royle" and "Harry Chichele." It seemed quite natural to see them there in print, her whole mind was so wholly preoccupied with them. And "Mohammad Ali," quite natural too; Seeta hardly noticed the occurrence of the names as anything unusual. "Mr. Ivan Royle, the well-known artist, and Dr. Mohammad Ali, the Indian Mussulman physician, so famous for the part which he shared with the late Dr. H. Chichele in the investigation of the minute germs of zymotic diseases."

The letters conveyed no meaning to her mind. Her eyes fell upon them once and again mechanically. She looked and read and never realized their true import. "The Catastrophe in America. Latest Tele-

grams." It didn't interest her, and she turned to moodily brood once more upon her own unspeakable internal agony.

Again she looked, mechanically still ; and her eyes chanced to fall upon the leaded heading.

"Death of Mr. Ivan Royle, the well-known artist.—It is now quite certain that Mr. Ivan Royle was among the victims——"

Ivan Royle among the victims ? Victims of what ? That strange announcement, at last coming home to her, arrested Seeta's attention even in her present distressed and excited condition. He was her own cousin ; what could it mean ? She took up the paper and read the whole passage with profound astonishment. It ran somehow thus, in the modern bald telegraphic brevity of journalistic dispatches :—

"The Earthquakes in America. (From Our Own Correspondent.) New York, July 10.—Further accounts from Petroleum Gulch, Nev., state that the earthquake that recently visited that town has engulfed almost the entire area of Eagle City, with the greater part of the inhabitants, few of whom have been able to escape. It is surmised that among the dead were Mr. Ivan Royle, the well-known artist, and Dr. Mohammad Ali, the Indian Mussulman physician, famous for the part which he shared with the late Dr. H. Chichele in the investigation of the minute germs of zymotic diseases."

"Later.—Denver, Colorado ; July 11.—It is now quite certain that Mr. Ivan Royle was among the victims buried in the ruins of Eagle City, Nevada, overwhelmed by the recent earthquake. Colonel J. J. Ridley, of Petroleum Gulch, a gentleman well known in sporting circles west of the Mississippi, and one of the few survivors from the Sunset Lode catastrophe, has just arrived in this city from the devastated scene of the recent disaster. He claims to have spoken with Mr. Royle and a gentleman of Hindoo blood (confidently identified with Dr. Mohammad Ali) in the doomed town on the morning preceding the fatal convulsion. Both gentlemen are now missing, and it is probable that their remains might be found on search among the debris of the fallen settlement. The few survivors, however, have fled the spot, and there is no likelihood that any excavations will be made at the scene of the disaster. It is believed that in all parts of the territory over four hundred lives have been sacrificed in this sad calamity."

Seeta laid down the paper in an agony of alarm. At all costs, the terrible news must be kept from Olwen. Ivan Royle and Mohammad Ali dead at once ! How the very elements of nature seemed to be fighting against them ! Poor Ali ! He was so good, so true, so tender, so devoted ! Now that he was gone, Seeta felt she should miss him. As for Ivan, she cared far less for that. The shock came to her as a shock alone. Olwen's unnatural liking for the man who seemed by some strange chance to have usurped Harry's place in her feeble little mind had succeeded in making Seeta almost hate him. At best, now, she could only grudgingly forgive Ivan.

CHAPTER XLVL

IN the Far West, it was drier and drearier. From the base of the ledge, where the plateau fell to the prairie level, Mohammad Ali and Ivan toiled slowly onward across the open plain to the town of oil-wells they had descried through the morning haze from the summit. At the foot of the steep wall of rock, a path led by a straight course toward the wooden town—a path clearly trodden out by human footsteps, and with ruts beside it, worn into the soil, that marked the passage of rude cart-wheels. But Ivan and Ali noticed with dismay as they went that the trail had not been used for many years, or months at least; coarse weeds and knot-grasses grew over it freely, and dry desert vegetation occupied the deep ruts by the long disused and abandoned wayside. Nor was the prairie itself so enticing or so gay on nearer view as it had seemed when observed at a distance from above. The grass was arid, coarse, and stringy; the soil beneath gaped wide with thirsty chinks; and the bright flowers, that looked from afar so fresh and brilliant, proved at close quarters to be mostly hard and papery everlasting of various dingy and desert colours. It was only too clear that though they had passed the absolutely rainless region, they were still within the district of occasional stray showers alone; and a great draught must long have reigned over the whole area of the surrounding country. No sign of water yet gladdened their eyes. All around lay dry and dusty, with a draught and dustiness like the sage-brush and the desert they had just left behind them.

Half a mile from the base of the ledge, as they toiled onward painfully in grim silence, too depressed and too disheartened even to speak to one another, they came suddenly across a bend of the little railway which they had recognized with such joy from the height above. As they neared the track, all hope died down utterly in their minds. It was no railway, no line at all; but the mere skeleton and relic of a disused system. The rails themselves had all been torn up, and the very sleepers were in great part removed. The town was gone and all that belonged to it. They plodded thenceforth, with sinking hearts, along that grass-grown wreck of their highest hopes, the rest of their way to the phantom city.

At last they reached it. It was a town indeed, with streets and houses still standing in long lines, but as dead and as desolate as the sage-brush from which they had just escaped with so much difficulty. No sound of life echoed from its highways. Coarse weeds grew rank and tall in the roads. On either hand the houses stood silent, bare, and deserted. The town had clearly been abandoned, once and for all, at a single stroke, by every living soul among its inhabitants. They had gone away *en masse*, the wayfarers could see, taking with them everything that could be moved or carried.

The two men, dying with hunger and thirst and fatigue, tottered feebly together up the main street of that deserted town, and sat down at last, too dreary to speak, even if their parched tongues would have answered to their wills, on the tumble-down wooden steps of a dismantled grocery store.

They were as far off from the real world as ever. Men had tried to live in that spot and failed. There was no food, there was no water. No water! Mohammad Ali started eagerly to his feet. They must have had water. They must have laid it on from tanks or reservoirs or mountain torrents somewhere. There can be no town without a water supply. He entered the shop on whose steps they sat by its doorless gap. Counter and shelves still remained in their place, but not a canister or a box upon the bare frames anywhere. He went behind into the empty living-rooms. There was a kitchen and a sink at the rear of the house. Above the sink—oh! glorious, a tap. His eyes glistened. It was dry and rusty, but might still be of use. He turned the tap with a sharp wrench. Disappointment once more; it gave slowly on its rusted axis; it was dry, dry; not a drop of water. Mohammad Ali hurried into the next house. He wrenched with difficulty another rusty tap. Again no water. It was dry and old. Whatever the water supply might have been it had failed by this time, at least in the houses. Mohammad Ali returned once more with weary eyes to his starving friend. He shook his head ominously—he had no heart to speak—and sat down to die in despair beside him.

They might have sat there and waited till they died, so dispirited and despondent were they at this final collapse of their last hope, had not something suddenly stirred all at once in a house opposite them. The doors and windows were gone there too, and, peeping round the lintel, Mohammad Ali just caught the stealthy eyes of what in India he would have taken for a jackal, but which in the American prairie he judged rather to be the coyote of the country. Astonished at the sight, he leaped up hastily, and crossed the road. The skulking beast bursting away in terror, rushed headlong from the house by the backway as Ali entered, and on his road rattled over something that lay beneath the bar—for the house had been a saloon—and that sounded like glass as it jangled and clattered. Mohammad Ali stepped behind that empty and deserted counter; then, kneeling down, he saw four or five bottles lying on the ground, corked and wired; and oh! joy unspeakable, with something in them. He took one up. His eyes reeled as he saw what it contained. It was soda-water. Whoever had left that house and carried off all that it contained of valuables, had not thought the stuff worth carrying with him. To Mohammad Ali it was more precious than diamonds. He pulled off the wire with trembling fingers, and egged out the cork by dexterous side pressure. The soda-water had parted with most of its gas; but it was still fresh and quite drinkable. In his eager joy, he swallowed half the bottleful at one long famished pull, and returned with the other half, brandished aloft in his jubilant hand, to poor thirsty and despondent Ivan.

Their find inspired them like another reprieve. Where there was drink,

there might also be food. They returned together to the house opposite and opened a second bottle of that precious drink. It went down their throats with a feeling like balm. They counted the bottles. Never had anything earthly tasted so delicious. There were still three left. That was liquid enough to last them out for twenty-four hours. If only they had food, all might yet go well with them. Food, food, was now their chief requirement.

They turned to ransack the deserted grocery store. The shelves and bins were all utterly empty. They mounted the creaking, ramshackle stairs. They found nothing in the bedrooms and cupboards. "Let's try the cellar," Mohammad Ali said. They went down once more, and Ivan lighted a match to explore its contents. Thank heaven, the cellar was not quite empty. Among the skeletons of rats lay two tins of preserved lobster and one can of California peaches. The rats had eaten all else in the place; but these three tins were too much for the teeth of starving rats, even.

Ali took out a pocket-knife and opened them in haste. The contents were old, stale, and mouldy, but not uneatable. They swallowed the whole of the lobster first, and then the peaches. They were too hungry for prudent reserve. After that, they sank fatigued on the floor of the shop, and silently ruminated over their strange position.

For an hour they lay there in the shade of the empty building, and then, to their immense and boundless astonishment, they heard human voices resounding distinctly in the grass-grown street of that deserted city. At first they could hardly believe their ears, but as they listened the voices grew clearer and clearer. Mohammad Ali rushed out into the open, closely followed by Ivan, in his rags and tatters. It was true! It was true! They were saved! They were saved! Two covered wagons, drawn by four stout horses each, were moving slowly up the disused high street.

With a loud cry Ali and Ivan darted forward to meet them. The wagons were large and full of men, laughing and talking in excellent spirits. They had evidently come a long way, and were enjoying themselves in hilarious mirth. But at the sight of those two gaunt and tattered scarecrows, wasted and thin already with their four days' agony, the men drew up and looked for a moment paralyzed with fear, and with superstitious astonishment. It was strange enough to come back the first to that city of the dead, but stranger still to find as they entered it two living corpses advance like ghosts from the skeleton of a house on its outskirts to greet them. They seemed like dead inmates of a phantom city.

Till that moment, indeed, in the pressing anxiety of their life and death struggle, Ali and Ivan had wholly forgotten the weirdness and strangeness of their own wild and haggard appearance. But in truth, their aspect might well have astonished any one who came upon them unexpectedly in the grass-grown streets of that unpeopled town. Their clothes were ragged and torn with climbing, and bleached with the warping effect of the alkali; their faces and hands were burnt and scarred and covered with blood; their raw and broken knees peeped

out unabashed from the tattered rents in their dusty trousers ; their shirts were grimy, their collars gone, their hair unkempt and matted and dirty ; their eyes were sunken with watching and sleeplessness ; their cheek bones protuded almost through the skin ; and Ivan's face was wan and white as a ghost's, while Ali's natural blackness of hue was partly hidden by mingled dust and grime and grease and alkali. Two sorrier or more tottering specimens of humanity never yet came forth to the light of day to greet their fellows. The men looked at them, awe-struck and mystified, for a single moment ; then, as soon as they had reassured themselves that these were really living breathing human beings, and not ghosts or phantoms, as they seemed at first sight, they burst suddenly into loud peals of coarse and gay but by no means ill-humoured laughter.

"Why, boys," the driver of the foremost waggon cried out, addressing them jauntily, "you look as if you'd been left behind here when the folks cleared out, and hadn't eaten or drunk or cleaned yourselves up since your fellow-citizens vacated the ranche. What have you been doing, anyway, to get yourselves made into such a pair of scarecrows ? Earthshook, I surmise ! That's so, ain't it, eh, mister ?"

Mohammad Ali was the first to speak. "We've crossed the desert from Eagle City," he said ; "we've been walking, off and on, four days and nights, without food or drink, at least to speak of, and now we're more than half famished."

The men leaped down from the waggons at once, and formed a circle commiseratingly around them. "Run away from Eagle City ?" the first speaker asked, with evident interest. "Scar't by the earthquake over thar, I reckon. Wal, you look like it. You've had a pretty lively time of it, I should guess. Come along up here, Sambo, and have a sup of something to drink. And you too, mister ; you look more dead-alive 'n even the nigger."

Only a fortnight ago, it had stung Mohammad Ali to the very quick to hear himself called by those contemptuous names, and now, in the joy of human fellowship and a return to the world, he could have flung his arms around the rough but well-meaning men of that rude and careless prospecting party. He raised himself into the waggon with what strength he had left ; and the strangers lifted up Ivan carefully after him. "Dead beat !" the first speaker muttered compassionately. "Here you are, mister. Take a pull at that. It ain't water, nor yet milk. You'll find it to do you good, even if you do happen to be a melancholly teetotaller."

Ivan took a long drink at the flask the man held out to him, temptingly ; it was Bourbon whiskey, almost neat, but it tasted to him blander and sweeter than anything he had ever drunk in his life ; and then he sank exhausted back, wearied out with fatigue, on the floor of the waggon. One of the men passed the bottle on to Ali. The Indian took it and drank a deep draught. Then he looked anxiously and wearily at Ivan. The men noticed his earnest look at once, and one of them clapped him heartily on the back. "That's so," he said, with a friendly nod. "If you want a man to stick to you in hard times, you

take my advice, and go to a nigger. Niggers is scum when all goes well; but when you're dead broke, I say, and down on your luck, all their prime qualities seems to float uppermost, and they'll stick to you then like grim death to an Injun."

Ivan raised his head and looked them in the face with an appealing glance. "If you had been with us and seen all," he said earnestly, "you'd know that no man ever showed greater or nobler devotion to another than my Hindoo friend, Dr. Mohammad Ali."

Even those rough Westerners, coarse in manner and in grain as they were, read instinctively from his tone and manner the profound meaning of Ivan Royle's carefully-worded sentence. "Wal, you're a white man, and you'd ought to know," the first speaker replied after a short pause, in an altered tone. "He looks like the sort of man one would trust, right down, in a prairie fire. Jest you set yourself right thar, doctor. Boys, move aside a bit, and see you make the doctor square and comfortable."

As they drove on, Mohammad Ali told them the whole tale without the faintest pretence of reserve or concealment. He explained to them in full, with his quiet unobtrusive Eastern dignity, that he was a Mohammedan physician, a native of India by birth, but in practice in London, and that he had come to America to seek his friend, Ivan Royle, a well-known and distinguished English painter. At the last name the men looked up in quick surprise. "What, are *you* Royle?" one of them asked abruptly, turning to Ivan. "Why, we've all been reading about *you* in the papers. Then those blamed shunks at Eagle City have been setting you down to the credit of the shake without due regard for the public sentiment of journalistic accuracy. Monte Joe, the most notorious gambler on the Pacific Slope, he claims in this morning's *Democrat* to have seen you crushed by a falling house in the midst of the cataclysm. Monte Joe was always a hard swearer, he was; but even he never perjured himself wus'n that, I reckon. Here you are. You can read it yourself, in the last edition of the *Oil City Democrat*:— 'Apalling Calamity on the Flanks of the Sierras. A Town Buried beneath its own Ashes. A Prominent English Artist engulfed in the Shock. The London (England) *Times* Deploras his Loss. Colonel Joseph Jefferson Ridley moralizes on the Effects of the Awful Catastrophe. Monte Joe in a New Character. He disapproves of the citizens of Eagle City, and compares their destruction to the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah. Is Saul also among the prophets?' There's something tall for you, Colonel, I guess, in the way of leaded headlines?"

He ran his finger down the column lightly, and then read out again in an impressive voice: "Among the earliest victims, it is believed, of the dire calamity was Ivan Royle, a talented artist from London, England, who had been engaged in painting up for a British firm the scenes and scenery of Nevada's wild and lonely sierras. As soon as news of the disastrous catastrophe was wired east, telegrams were despatched from New York by the agents of a prominent London journal inquiring after Mr. Royle's safety. According to Colonel Joseph J.

Ridley, better known in sporting circles as Monte Joe, the only survivor yet interviewed, Royle was in the city on the day of the shock, and was crushed by the fall of the Road to Ruin, a low gambling saloon which he often frequented. Joe told a reporter he considered Eagle City the worst and most abandoned hole on the Pacific slope, and though he was occasionally attracted there himself by business, he does not regret the extinction of such a vile nest of thieves and gamblers. It is conjectured from this that he owed money to several deceased citizens. The colonel speaks severely of the sin of gambling now, and proposes to retire from active life into the State Legislature. He claims that Eagle City provoked its just doom from an indulgent Providence, and he compares its fall to the fiery destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The public do not implicitly accept the sincerity of Joe's tardy conversion. They say he might with propriety have begun earlier."

Mohammad Ali gasped with surprise. In a few words he described to them the real scene that accompanied his own and Ivan's expulsion from that doomed camp. The men laughed, but were evidently weighed down within by a superstitious awe. "Depend upon it, doctor," the driver said, impressively, "it was a special Providence. The hymn says, 'in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform.' You two was meant to be saved from that thar earthquake. Thar's where it is. Eagle City had got to go, but afore it went it threw the two just men out of it."

They drove along at a rattling pace to a house on the outskirts of the phantom town, where the men descended, with an air of old acquaintance; a house as ruinous and desolate and dreary as all its neighbours, but which their new friend seemed to accept as his own at once by right of discovery. So far, the fugitives had been too fatigued to dream of questioning their strange rescuers; they were satisfied to be back once more in human company, and to see some chance, in a dim way, of a return to England. It was all like a dream, and, as in a dream, they took it all in without surprise or wonder. But when one of the men leaped down at last on the steps of the ramshakled tenement and cried aloud, "Wal, gentlemen, welcome back once more to home and Carthage!" Mohammad Ali's curiosity was fairly aroused, and he asked as he alighted, "Is this Carthage?"

"That's so, doctor," his new friend answered gravely. "You are sitting, like Julius Cæsar or Pompey, or whoever the classical gent might be, among the ruins of Carthage. My name's Hannibal,—Hannibal Mulkins. I was formerly printer, editor, and publisher of that high-class journal, the *Carthaginian Patriot*. Eight years ago Carthage was abandoned owing to a shake. Circumstances (over which we have no control) have changed since then, and to-day we all go solid for rebuilding the good old Phœnician city. The Punic wars are now over. Another Dido shall establish anew a permanent citadel on the sides of the desert."

"I see," Ali said: "the town was abandoned because an earthquake made the wells fail."

"Doctor," Mr. Hannibal Mulkins answered with an awkward bow,

"you put it thar. You're a right smart man. You sot your finger down upon it straight, thar. Yessir, that's exactly how it all happened. Jest eight years ago, we was earthshook here on this very spot, till all the ceilings was on the drawing-room carpets, and roofing shingles was quoted at an alarming discount in the retail markets. But it wasn't for that we cleared out you bet."

It was the water as drove 'em. The earthquake dried up the river as well as the oil springs. We don't mind snakes, and we don't mind oil famines, but, as a sober community, we go it blind on water. You never see such a scattering of the clans in all your days. There ain't been anything seen like it anywhere, ever since Exodus. And when you arrived at Carthage by yourselves this morning, I calculate you found business kind of suspended."

"We did," Ali answered with perfect gravity. "Every store we went into was under liquidation. But why are you all coming back now? Because the oil has begun to run again?"

"Oil? Wal, yes, oil has a finger in it, I don't deny; but it's not the oil only—though that's running extremely lively—but the water, too, that brings us back again to the Lares and Panates. 'Pears as if this last big shake had sort of reversed the action of the previous one. The oil's pumping up of itself now, as hard as it can go, without any horse-power, and the river's flowing as if it had to make up in full for all arrears between this and Christmas."

"The river!" Ali cried. "Is there a river here, then? Not down the canyon, for we came that way. There isn't a drop of water there anywhere."

"No, not down the canyon," his friend assented with a quiet nod, "but from the wall south. There's springs in the wall—at least there was—that must have bust out again from the look of the country. Any way, we got the news of the fresh departure at Oil City yesterday; people up the trail noticed water coming down the river like mad again, and coal oil floating and dancing like a ballet girl on top of it. And as we're large holders of town lots in Cathgate, the boys and I, we didn't lose a minute, but came up her right smart to settle in; for the wells are run dry at Oil City, and to-morrow Carthage 'll be on the boom as fresh as ever. Last week, town lots here wasn't worth the value of the paper you'd transfer 'em on, and to-day—do you see this 'ere ramshackle old lot of mine thar, doctor? Wal, I've got frontage right down to the river, and a bit of the canyon for a mile up; and I wouldn't take fifty thousand dollars for the ground this minute—not if you was to offer it; no, sir, I wouldn't. We'er going to be in for a big thing, I tell you that, and Carthage will rise like the Phoenix once more resplendant from her ashes. Oil 'll well out from her like an oleaginous Big Bonanza. We've struck it now, and we mean to stick to it. Look alive thar, boys, and tote them blankets in smart, will you?"

That night at last Ivan Royle and Mohammad Ali slept, if not in a civilized bed, at least under what had once been a civilized roof, and with real bed-clothes wrapped tightly round them. Their unexpected

rescuers were kindness itself, in a rough way, to the wearied wayfarers; and, when they had learnt all their story, did their very best to relieve their wants with food and attention. The ghastly ordeal was over at last. They were in touch once more with European civilization. They slept like children on the hard floor that happy night, and never woke again till the morning sun had risen high above the ruined roofs of their tumble-down refuge.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THREE days later, Seeta Mayne sat lonely in her own little room at Polperran Rectory—for she was almost a fixture there now—debating deeply in her much perturbed mind how she could ever break that terrible news to poor crushed and terror-stricken Olwen.

As she sat there, wondering and doubting to herself what course would be best for her to take, a timid little knock at the door aroused her suddenly. She rose to open it, and found Olwen standing in a light black-and-white mourning gown, with her garden hat hanging loose in her hand, and a frightened expression of mingled alarm and wonder on her childish face. "What is it, darling?" she asked tenderly. "You look frightened, Olwen. Has anybody been terrifying you? Do you want me for anything?"

Olwen held up a telegraph envelope. "This has come for you, Seeta," she said, resolutely, "and I took it from the boy myself to bring it up to you. There's something the matter: I'm sure there is. They tried so hard to keep me from getting it."

It was Seeta's turn to grow pale with fright. A telegram from America, no doubt, announcing the recovery of Ivan's body from the mangled ruins of Eagle City. She snatched the envelope from Olwen in tremulous haste, and thrust it hurriedly into her breast with a look of utter despair and terror. But Olwen's suspicions were now fairly aroused, and, like a mischievous child, she dashed at it wildly and tore it once more from Seeta's bosom. Before Seeta could intervene she had broken the flap, and was reading the telegram by the open window.

Seeta glanced over her shoulder in agony. What could it be? The words brought the blood back to her heart with a bound. "Report of our death quite baseless. Ivan and I returned at once by steamer *City of Savannah*, reaching Liverpool about the 30th.—MOHAMMAD ALI."

Olwen burst into a flood of tears and buried her head nestling on Seeta's shoulder. "Oh, Seeta!" she cried, "have I done wrong? Was it—was it right of me to ask him to fetch Ivan?"

It was the first outburst of womanly feeling they had ever seen in her since her great shock. Hitherto, she had talked and felt and acted like a child. The near approach of a meeting with Ivan seemed to rouse some faint echo of the half-forgotten woman once more within

her. Day by day she had been growing, as it were, to maturity again. This prospect brought her back to the very verge of womanhood.

Seeta soothed her and stroked her hair. "It was quite right, my darling," she answered, with a sinking heart. Heaven help her for that lie! She felt she was aiding and abetting in treachery to Harry. "Ivan's a kind, good fellow, and very fond of you. He's my cousin, too, and I've always admired him. You like Ivan. It's well you should have him back now near you."

"But suppose——" Olwen said, raising her face, and then checked herself suddenly. A faint blush spread like a rosy cloud over her pale cheek. She buried her head on Seeta's shoulder once more, and sobbed away the conflicting feelings within her. She was no longer a child—a mere child. Some vague reminiscences of maidenly shame were reviving slowly in her poor puzzled and bewildered nature.

Ivan was very kind and good; but somehow she fancied she oughtn't to have asked for him to come from America. She thought it must be wrong to ask for anybody. America's so very far away, and perhaps Ivan was awfully busy there.

Seeta ran down to the drawing-room in haste followed by Olwen. "Has the paper come?" she asked of the housemaid. The girl handed her that morning's *Times*. Yes, there it was sure enough. "Safety of Mr. Ivan Royle.—Denver, Colorado, July 14. Mr. Ivan Royle and Dr. Mohammad Ali, arrived safely two days since at Carthage, Montana."

It was quite true. In another fortnight Ivan would be back. The fugitives from the tender mercies of Eagle City had been carefully tended by Mr. Hannibal Mulkins and his lively partner, and were now on a fair way of recovery from the fatigue and exposure of their incredible journey. The dangers and hardships they had undergone made them the lions of the moment in rejuvenescent Carthage, in spite even of the bustle and excitement which necessarily attended its second foundation. The Carthaginians were kindness and care itself. Carthage was being renovated under Ivan's very eyes with the marvellous rapidity of American civilization. The houses were being re-roofed, the doors and windows replaced, the waterworks re-established, the rails relaid. The noise of hammers resounded perpetually through the ruined streets. When they quitted Carthage, four days later, it was already a town of some three hundred inhabitants, and every hour brought its new arrivals on foot or by waggon. People were reclaiming their abandoned town lots, and re-furnishing their shattered and dismantled houses. Ivan and Ali had slept for two nights before they left on a real bedstead, and they went away by the first train on the hastily made railway that crawled over the roughly-laid temporary sleepers from resurgent Carthage.

Happily, Mohammad Ali had still his circular letters of credit from his London banker—the roughs of Eagle City had feared to appropriate those, lest detection should fall upon them in Eastern towns—and at Denver, where they stopped for a day *en route*, they were able to fit themselves up with clothes anew, getting rid of the grotesque rig-out which the hospitality of Carthage had pressed upon their heads with more zeal than discretion. Thence they hurried on, post haste, to New

York, where they took berths in the very first steamer that sailed for Liverpool. It was the one Ali had mentioned in his telegram to Seeta, the *City of Savannah*, of the Blue Diamond line, one of the largest, best, and fastest vessels on the great steam ferry between America and England.

As Ali planted his foot once more upon a British deck, and saw the long low line of Sandy Hook fading fast behind him in the dim distance, he drew a long breath, and gave a heart-felt sigh of profound relief. Thank God, he was rid of America for ever !

Till that terrible journey, he had never known how great a privilege it was to be a British subject. As he paced the deck of the *City of Savannah*, however, ploughing her way across the sea to England, he felt at last like a free man ; he recognized the truth that nowhere in the world is a person of his colour so raised above the reach of vulgar prejudice as within the four sea walls of Britain. He longed for the rocky coasts of Ireland to appear on their bows as he could never have longed for the sight of his native land. England has many and great faults ; nobody knew them better than Mohammad Ali ; but, at least, it is the land where human freedom and individual opinion are most respected, the land where the naked value of man, as man, is rated the highest, the land where, "girt with friends or foes, a man may speak the thing he will," in public or in private. Mohammad Ali loved it now with a love passing the love of its own children. No one, indeed, can love England so well as those who have found in her the freedom to think, and act, and speak, which other countries—their own included—have rudely denied them.

In America, and even in the British colonies, individuality and liberty of opinion are wholly unknown. Men must think and speak as the mass thinks and speaks, or hide their belief deep in their own bosoms. It is in England alone that a man is a man, in spite of race or creed or caste or colour—in England alone that a man may say almost everything he honestly feels and believes, without fear of interference from the crushing weight of public opinion. This is our one great English birthright ; may we never give it up to the loud cries of any democracy, Tory or Radical, however many-headed, blatant and unreasoning.

On the seventh day out, the *City of Savannah* was getting fairly well abreast of the coast of Donegal. No uglier coast exists anywhere round the British islands, even in the fairest and clearest of weather : and when the *City of Savannah* was nearing Tory Island, its furthest outpost, the sky was distinctly dark and murky.

As the day grew older, the fog ahead thickened rapidly, and by afternoon they were going half speed through a white mist of the most blinding character.

Nevertheless, at dinner, the captain was in his place at the head of the table. When the captain turns up in the saloon at feeding times, all is running smooth on the ship, you may be certain. With danger ahead, the captain's place is upon the bridge. His broad red face at

the head of the table is the visible symbol to all whom it may concern of security and comfort.

The fog lay thick on the sea, and the shrill-toned fog horn was droning out almost constantly its dull, lugubrious, monotonous music. Fog-horns are the incarnation of the fiends of the sea. A nasty night on a crowded ocean lane. Craft by the dozen throng that passage. And they were slowing off now to approach Derry.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE Indian paced the quarter-deck in solemn silence. All the other passengers had gone below. The white mist shone bright around the ship's lights. Beyond, all was gloom and darkness visible. They were moving on at half speed, but with gigantic force, feeling their way through the waters blindfold. Every man likes to see where he's going. To the landsman, a storm at sea is the most terrible of all things; but the seafaring man knows better. He dreads a fog ten thousand times more than the worst hurricane that ever blew out of an angry heaven. He recognizes that the powerful monster on whose deck he stands is steadily ploughing her way onward, he knows not whither, with sightless haste, towards rock, or shoal, or iceberg, or collision.

Mohammad Ali, old sailor that he was, thinking these things in silence to himself, approached the gunwale to knock his ash off into the receptive Atlantic. As he did so, a voice rang out suddenly, clear and distinct, through the darkness of the night, from the forward lookout: "I see a light on the starboard bow," it said, in sharp tones of hasty warning. Then, after a short pause, "Great God! she's on us!"

Three quick short rings at the electric engine bell. A loud cry of "Port your Helm!" A sudden flash of white canvas amidships. A shivering bowsprit. An echoing crash. A shock that jarred and quivered through the great ship's planks. A hurried turmoil of conflicting orders. A brig foundering helpless in an eddying sea before their very eyes. A noise of loud waters rushing into the hold. And then, in an instant, all was over!

Later on, the terrified passengers learnt in detail that a collier brig had struck the *City of Savannah* on the starboard side, just abaft the boiler-room, had sunk herself, almost unseen, and had stove in the steamer's hull bodily, with her fierce onslaught. But for the moment they only knew in a vague way that something disastrous had overtaken their vessel. They hurried up from their berths, alarmed and eager. In a few minutes the deck was thickly crowded with men, women, and children, in hasty costumes, some of them pale, calm, and resolute; others crying, groaning, and wringing their hands in an impotent agony of unspeakable terror. The steerage passengers in parti-

cular were quite uncontrollable. It was an awful sight. Mohammad Ali hoped never to see another such. The fright and misery of the women and children was bad enough, but the callous selfishness of many of the men struck him absolutely speechless with disgust and anger. They rushed at the boats in wild dismay, bearing down in their panic the helpless creatures whom they ought to have protected, and they were only beaten off from them at last with difficulty by the strenuous resistance of officers and crew, who fronted them with revolvers in serried order.

Before the crowd of passengers on deck could see what arrangements were being made for their safety, with a sudden snap the ship was enveloped in black darkness. Modern science has added that further horror to all the older horrors of a hasty shipwreck. The water, pouring in like a flood into the damaged compartments, had put out the fires, and, with the stoppage of the engines, the electric light, with which the steamer was fitted from end to end, went out at once, leaving the stunned and bewildered passengers to grope their way up in fear and trembling as best they might through the dark long corridors. Next moment, a rush and a confused sound of shouting voices was heard forward, where a mob of black and grimy wretches surged madly up the steps from the engine-room and coal bunkers, whence the water which was drowning and quenching the fires, had hastily driven them. It was the body of firemen—the stokers and engine-tenders—a wild gang, naked to the waist and covered with coal dust, who made boldly for the boats in one fierce sharp dash, shrieking and yelling with their hoarse voices more like frenzied demons than like human beings in their proper senses. These miserable creatures are never true seamen; most often they are the vilest and lowest of the low, the drunken refuse poured forth by dens and slums in seaport towns, who ship in despair as firemen in the last resort, sometimes for a single voyage only, to work out their passage in dirt and discomfort to the other side. Their employment is the most hateful and degrading known to mankind. Naked and wretched, in stifling heat and utter darkness, cooped up in the close and airless bowels of a tossing ship, sleepless and miserable night and day alike, these outcast parasites of our skin-deep civilization, the necessary victims of our great and boasted Atlantic steamship service, toil on from hour to hour, in sickness and grime, stoking the fires for a miserable wage, dripping with sweat from every pore, and kept down in emergencies by brute force on the part of the officers and sailors who use and despise them. And now that the sea was fairly upon them, drowning their fires and flooding their quarters, they rushed up in a mass, more like brute beasts than human beings, in a frantic endeavour to seize the boats for themselves before the women and children of the luckier few could manage to get them.

A terrible struggle ensued by the davits. The officers and sailors, armed with belaying pins, and dealing hard blows without mercy on their panic-stricken assailants, laid about them right and left upon the naked backs and shoulders of the fierce mob. The firemen, in their turn, possessed like devils with the strange insensibility of terror and

despair, heedless of the blows showered down with stunning force upon their heads and shoulders by the angry officers, sprang into the boats and began to lower them with hasty hands in their craven care for their own wretched and useless lives. If you choose to reduce men to the level of brutes, you must take the consequences. The firemen fought with teeth and nails and fists and hands and feet, like cats or monkeys, springing savagely in the faces of the trained sailors, who, inured to danger and thoroughly disciplined, fought them hard with ordered organization for the passengers and women. The captain, rushing down from the bridge, revolver in hand, stood threateningly at their head beside the davits. "You black devils!" he cried in a voice of thunder that rose above the shouts and wails and groaning of the women; "the very first man that looses a rope, I'll shoot him dead as soon as look at him."

The firemen laughed with hoarse, grim laughter. Their blood was up, and they cared little for threats. One of them untied the nearest slip-knot. *Cr-r-r-ack*. The captain's revolver boomed over the deck. The man fell, bleeding profusely from his breast, into the boat above. But the others never slackened or heeded one second for that. Before the crew could stop them, three of the boats, half filled with grimy and shrieking wretches, were lowered to the sea. One of them, carelessly loosed by unskilful and terrified hands, capsized as she fell; and the men rolled over, with a ghastly cry and with shrieks and oaths, into the silent water. The rest, in the other two boats, never pausing or waiting to succour them for a moment, pushing off with their oars from the sinking broadside, riding down their drowning comrades as they clutched or struggled in the cold sea, and were lost forthwith in the fog and the darkness.

The capsized boat filled and sank rapidly. The steamer was lowering visibly every instant towards the water's edge. Captain and men, relieved from most of the firemen now, were busy letting down the remaining boats as hastily as possible. The half-dozen stokers still left upon the deck, however, fought hard even yet for possession of one more among them. Ivan Royle, Mohammad Ali, and a few other of the calmer and more cool-headed passengers, acting under orders from the captain, held them at bay with belaying pins and rope-ends, while the crew prepared the nearest and largest boat for the women and children. The captain, quiet and collected, like a man accustomed to such scenes of terror, stood by and directed everything in admirable order with a firm and steady voice. Discipline does wonders on an emergency. In an incredibly short space of time the boats were lowered, and the women and children were being safely placed in them by the strong and kindly hands of the sailors.

Two boats were rapidly and successfully filled with those helpless freights. The stoutest of the sailors manned them in good order, and the chief officer and another took command in the stern. With a steady push they got well under way, and faded in turn through the dim fog, into the blackness of night. The men on board were left alone now. Mohammad Ali glanced sideways at Ivan. Pray heaven, he thought—

for Olwen's sake—they might put him in the next boat they lowered.

Only two boats now remained. One had been crushed by the bow of the collier, which wrenched the mizzen rigging from its fastenings bodily, and crushed the captain's gig into little pieces. Into these two last, the elder and feebler male passengers were hurriedly thrust. A few of the lads among the crew were also included, as well as the ship's doctor, specially favoured on the domestic ground that he had only just married. The boats were filling up rapidly at the last. Mohammad Ali began to fear, with an unspoken terror, that no place would be found in either for Ivan. The first of the two big tubs had already been loaded and cast off to her fate. The second was almost as full as she could hold. "Room for one more," the officer in charge called out in a loud clear voice. Mohammad Ali pushed his friend suggestively forward. "Jump in, Ivan," he cried in eager haste. "It's your last chance. Take it while it lasts. Go now; go quickly. If you don't make haste, some one else will snap at it. For *her* sake, it's your duty, your duty."

Ivan hung back with unfeigned reluctance. How could he leave his generous friend behind him? "Ali," he cried I can't do it. Jump in yourself. I can never desert you. Go, go, I beg of you. You're worth a thousand such men as me. If I went without you, I could never spend another happy moment."

At the word the grimy firemen made another ugly rush. Was this a time to stand upon politeness? The few remaining sailors beat them off with difficulty. "Now then, sir," the officer in charge called out sharply. "Are you coming or are you not? We can't wait for you. If she sinks, her wash'll founder us. One or the other, make up your mind which, but don't stand there for ever disputing about it!"

Ivan turned with one despairing look, and tried to push Ali by main force into the loaded boat. As he did so, the firemen dashed forward once more in a wild onset, and tried to break through the little serried line of brave defenders. "White men first," the captain cried in a tone of authority. Mohammad Ali and a sailor seized Ivan as he spoke, resistlessly, by his waist and arms, and almost flung him on to the thwarts below. Ivan struggled, but all in vain. The sailors caught him, and set him in his place with an air of authority. The bosun's whistle sounded shrill at once through the darkness of the fog. The boat held off, and stood about a minute. "Good-bye," Mohammad Ali shouted triumphantly from the deck. "Every man has his fate. My work is done. Good-bye, Ivan."

"Good-bye," Ivan cried in a voice choked with emotion. Next moment the boat faded away in the dim and murky fog, and the last that Ivan saw of his devoted friend was a black hand, with a diamond ring upon it, waving farewell to him from the deck of the sinking steamer.

The captain and Ali, with a handful of the ablest-bodied passengers and a few sailors, were left alone now face to face with the infuriated

remnant of the half-naked firemen. The *City of Savannah* was foundering fast. The water rose high above the lower port-holes, and only the saloon stood high above the level of the calm sea. "Brandy! Brandy!" the fireman cried in a wild shout, and rushed to the bar. They seized the bottles, and, breaking them against one another in their frantic haste, drank from their necks the neat spirits with the greed of despair. Meanwhile, the captain, cool and collected still, as if nothing out of the ordinary run had happened, was dealing out life preservers to passengers and crew with official regularity. Every man took one and girded it round his waist in solemn silence. The firemen, returning, took theirs too, and seizing on whatever spars they could find about the ship, flung themselves off with half-drunken shouts into the black water. Two of them still lay stunned with their wounds and the blows of the belaying-pins huddled up on the deck. The captain and crew seemed absolutely to disregard their despised presence. "Take a plank each," the captain cried in as clear and authoritative a tone as ever. "Fill your flasks with brandy—you'll want it soon in the cold water—jump overboard quietly, and swim together in good order. You're not above two miles from the Donegal coast. If you can find a landing place anywhere on the cliffs you can get all safe to shore still, the Lord helping us."

Mohammad Ali alone stood unmoved upon the deck, with folded arms, beside the fallen fireman. He didn't attempt to put on the life-buoy the captain had handed him. As he said himself, his work was done. He had brought back Ivan in safety to Olwen. His own life would be but a snare in the way. Ivan knew that he loved Olwen madly—devotedly. Ali had never attempted to conceal his feeling in that matter from his friend. He had spoken freely to him, first at Polperran, then again at Cannes, afterwards in the desert, and now once more—over and over again—on this last voyage. If Ivan and Olwen were ever married, the friendship between himself and his English comrade could never be as strong as it had lately been. No man, not even the best of men, can wish his wife to be constantly meeting a hopeless lover, who loves her still with a passion all the more intense because of its utter and entire hopelessness. Mohammad Ali had lived his life. He had performed his task. The world could give him nothing more than it had given him already. It was time for him to die. The sensitive Indian, like a good Moslem, accepted fate, when it came, with smiling resignation. Death to him was but a friendly visitor.

"Now then, Dr. Ali," the captain called out in his gruff voice, "the *City of Savannah* won't last ten minutes longer. She's flooded all through. Put on your belt and swim like a man. You're not afraid—an old hand like you? I thought not. No time to be lost! The water's well up to the lower deck already."

Mohammad Ali's lip curled as he waived the rough seafaring man aside with a courteous movement of his delicate black hand. "Save yourselves, friends," he said, with a gentle sigh. "Never mind about me. No, no; I'm not afraid, indeed. I'm a medical man, and I'll stop behind to look after the wounded. I can drown here as well as

elsewhere. These poor battered creatures shan't go down alone. I'll wait and do what I can for them to the end."

The captain gazed at him with a stony stare. "Are you mad, man?" he cried, with a sudden burst of undisguised astonishment. "If you don't swim for it, you'll drown like a rat. The shore over there's not two miles distant. Strike out for your life, if you care to live, and leave these brutes here alone to go down at their leisure."

As he spoke, a light breeze blew aside the curling wreaths of mist on the sea for a moment, and dark and grim, far, far away to starboard, the gaunt black cliffs of Malin Head rose sheer and steep through the dark, lowering clouds, with precipitous sides, to the dusky vault of night above them. The chance of landing on that iron coast was slight indeed. A man might swim for miles and miles without ever a prospect of finding a gap. Mohammad Ali brushed aside the delusive scheme as a cobweb of hope. He folded his arms again gloomily where he stood. "No, no," he answered. "Don't trouble for me. 'I'm an Arab of the Arabs. I'm not afraid to die. If fate wills it, I will die here. But I will not struggle against doom for nothing. Good-bye, good friends. May Allah preserve you. Land safely. For me, I go down, all standing, with the steamer.'"

The captain and remaining passengers, afraid to delay, leaped at last from the side, and, supported on planks in the calm sea, struck out boldly in the direction of that cruel shore. Malin Head, with its stern grim walls of naked rock, still showed dimly through the rolling mist; but the fog was gathering denser and thicker once more now. Mohammad Ali, with his arms folded like a statue, stood calm and unmoved beside the fallen firemen. At two hundred yards off, the captain paused in his swim and looked back. The water had risen then to the level of the deck, and the *City of Savannah* was sinking fast in a swirling eddy. It had sunk to the level of the Indian's knees. The captain could just decry two crossed arms, one black hand folded above a grey tweed sleeve, and the gleam of a diamond that shone like a star in the light reflected from the lamp at the mast-head. Next moment the fog intervened to hide him; the water rushed over the spot where he stood with a noise like a whirlpool; the sea-gulls hovered about the sunken masts; and that was the last the captain ever saw of Mohammad Ali.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE boat in which Ivan Royle had been hurried away from the wreck of the *City of Savannah*, more than half against his will, made for the shore by Malin Head as fast as ten good pairs of stout oars could carry it forward. If possible, they wished to land the passengers near the Head, and return in time to take the remainder of the officers and crew from the wreck before she sank in deep water. But landing on

that bleak and clean-cut Donegal coast, except in the Loughs, is well-nigh impossible. The outliers of Slieve Guaght descend by a leap to the water's edge, from a giddy height; and the boat once caught between breakers and rocks on that deadly seaboard must inevitably be dashed to pieces, a helpless hull, against the solid foot of the tall black foreland. They were compelled, therefore, to row round into the deep bay at the entrance to Lough Swilly, and after six hours' hard work at the oars, feeling their way doubtfully through the mist, they found, at last, a possible beach about ten miles north of the desolate little fishing village of Lower Duncreagh.

The passengers in Ivan's boat were landed alone on a harbourless shore, ten miles from anywhere, with hardly even the hut of a Donegal peasant in sight, high up the slopes of the green mountains, but with a path opening up the glen behind them which led at last (though they did not know it) to the shielings of Duncreagh and the town of Buncrana. For the present, accordingly, there was nothing to be done but to camp out as they were on the open coast, while a few of the stronger and heartier men made their way inland by the path over the neighbouring hills in search of help and food for the party from the nearest village. Donegal is indeed a bad country on which to be wrecked. It can hardly feed its own hardy natives, let alone a hungry band of strangers. The sea is rough; the shore is steep; the land is lean; the hills are rocky; and the human habitations are few and far between on the broken ledges of the wan green mountains.

To Ivan Royle, however, none of these questions for the moment had any interest. One burning desire alone possessed his soul—the desire to go back again in quest of Ali. At first, the sailors were most unwilling to allow him; they meant to put back to the wreck themselves in hot haste, they said, to see if they could pick up any drowning men on spars or planks—for the *City of Savannah* herself must have foundered long since—but it was against the company's rules for any passenger, once landed, to be exposed to further unnecessary danger. Ivan pleaded so hard, however, for the right to return, offering to take an oar if the officer would permit him, that at last the authorities reluctantly consented.

The morning light was breaking now over that beautiful, treacherous coast of Donegal. The pale green hills, from head to foot one mass of thick short turf, rising to the sky in bald round summits, like gigantic domes, and sheared off close to the water's edge in colossal precipices, stood out in clear outline against the blue overhead, and showed to the full all their stern wild beauty. The mist and fog had disappeared at last, and the sun rose majestic in his glory from the sea, with crimson clouds to herald his coming, and purple reflections to greet his rays on the flanks of the mountains. But the men rowed on as if for dear life, never stopping to gaze at those wonderful cliffs or those towering pinnacles of black Irish trachyte. They were bound for the wreck, on an errand of mercy, and Ivan Royle's whole soul summed itself up in one wild impulse—the eager desire to save Mohammad Ali.

On, on they drove their stout boat through the blue sea, now wreath-

ing and curling in light lippy waves, for the breeze was rising fresh with the sun, as the fog cleared off, abreast all the time of the great black cliffs, till the final promontory of Malin Head itself loomed large and frowning on the right beside them. They were nearly at the scene of the wreck now; the officer in charge had noted it well through the rift in the fog before they started, with Malin Head light and the old windmill in a line to eastward, and the jagged cliff like a lion's head bearing a point or two west of the peak of Slieve Carrow. Ivan Royle looked eagerly around. The water was strewn with floating wreckage — deck-chairs and spars, and here and there a plank or two, but no sign anywhere of the *City of Savannah*. "Sunk, dead, in thirty fathoms of water," the officer muttered, with a shake of his head. "We must cruise about a bit now to pick up the bodies."

They rowed around, examining with care every bit of wreckage that drifted across their path, and straining their sight for distant objects, but not a token of a human corpse greeted their inquiring eyes anywhere.

"They may have swum for shore," the officer said, as with hand to his eyes he scanned the horizon. "The captain would deal them all out life-preservers. In a calm sea like the one we had last night they could round the Head with the flowing tide, and they may have climbed on the ledges of the cliffs round the corner.

It was a gleam of hope, though a very faint one, and Ivan accepted it accordingly as some modicum of comfort. He tried to believe it. Ali was tough, and had lived through much. Perhaps he had lived through this also.

They rowed round Malin Head with groaning oars, against wind and current, and scanned the cliffs. No sign of anything bigger than a puffin anywhere on their tall and shallow ledges.

As they weathered the Head, a small fishing smack hove full in sight round the rocky shore of Innistrathull. She bore down upon them at once, scudding easily before the light easterly breeze. When they had got within speaking distance, the boat hailed her. "Ahoy, there, friend! Any survivors picked up from the *City of Savannah*?"

A familiar voice answered from the deck; "Yes, here we are, all of us. Smack picked us up off the Head this morning. We'd taken to the planks. Crew all safe. Come aboard and report where you landed passengers."

It was the captain who spoke. Then there was hope still. Ivan Royle lifted up his voice and shouted tremulously, "Have you saved Doctor Ali?"

The captain shook his head with an ominous shake. "No," he answered; "the doctor's lost. Our only passenger gone. His own fault. He went down standing aboard the *Savannah*. She's sunk about two miles sow'-west-by-west of Malin Head, in thirty fathoms. Most of the rest are safe, I believe, bar the firemen. We're cruising about to pick up the bodies."

Ivan raised his head and cried once more, "Are you sure he's lost?" "Certain of it. He wouldn't be saved. Saw him go down myself

on the deck of the steamer. He was the very last man left living aboard. He waited on deck till the water was rising right above the companion. Then the rest of us threw ourselves off with life-belts and swam for it. The doctor wouldn't. He stopped behind ; and we saw him go down with our own eyes, the *Savannah* and he, and a couple of wounded firemen. He was standing with his arms crossed on deck ; and he said something about its being all fate ; and he died like a man, right there on the quarterdeck, with the two disabled firemen lying huddled in front of him."

Ivan Royle laid down his oar and burst into tears like a child or a woman. Dangers and difficulties faced together had made those two into adopted brothers. No man ever wept more truly for a brother than Ivan Royle for Mohammad Ali.

And how they had longed to see the cliffs of Ireland !

CHAPTER L.

IN the club at Londonderry, Colonel Arthur Mayne sat lounging and smoking with some brother-officers and a small group of appreciative civilians. One of them, seated in a chair by himself at the far end, was greedily devouring Seeta's latest, that strange weird story of a lost love, "*Winifred's Doom*," in which her brother recognized, with a shudder of dislike, some faint echoes of her own life and her hopeless passion for dead Harry Chichele. The others were on their legs, chatting in a group round the bow window ; and one burly fellow, the major of the regiment, cigar in mouth, was examining the board with the latest telegrams from London posted as they came in for members' inspection.

"Devilish awkward thing this," the major said, removing the cigar carelessly from his mouth for a second, "about the loss of that steamer, the *City of Savannah*. The sea's as dangerous as the land in Ireland, nowadays. Telegram from Greencastle, just come in, reports another boat-load of passengers landed near Buncrana. Shouldn't be surprised if they starve outright over there, do you know. Buncrana can hardly supply itself with potatoes, let alone feeding a miscellaneous crew of hungry Americans. The Sligo election's gone the wrong way, too, I see. Deuced awkward for the Government just at this juncture, a mess like that. Got a light anywhere about you, Mayne ? Thank you. Thank you. These are capital weeds of yours, upon my soul. But you always do have the best of weeds, and no wonder. I wouldn't like to be your tobacconist, though, poor devil ! It must cost him something tidy per annum to keep you supplied with weeds of this quality."

Arthur Mayne laughed an uneasy laugh. "I wonder," he said, roping the pointed ends of his moustache with a deprecatory smile, "whether that *City of Savannah's* the ship my

cousin, Ivan Royle, and that Baboo friend of his, were coming home in? Royle has a capacity that amounts to positive genius for getting into scrapes, you know. Adventures are to the adventurous, the proverb says; and if there's a row or an adventure on anywhere, my cousin Ivan's cock-sure to be brandishing his shillelagh, or at least his palette, in the very thick of it. He and his chocolate-coloured Baboo fellow are for ever catching cholera, or getting shipwrecked, or losing themselves in trackless deserts, or being blown up with ten tons of dynamite, or something of that sort, by way of amusement. The train they take's certain to smash up; the ship they sail in's safe to collide; the hotel they stop at's bound to be burnt down; and the house they live in's doomed to tumble incontinently with a crash about their ears. It's a sort of fate that pursues some people. I'd lay any one of you fellows two to one in fivers that Royle and the Baboo were on the *City of Savannah*."

"Hard cash, or paper?" the burly major inquired, with a knowing smile.

His superior officer winced visibly. "Hard cash," he answered, with as careless an air as he could well muster. "I'm flush just now—for me, I mean. I've received remittances. But I should most particularly like to know whether the Baboo really went down in that ship or didn't."

"It appears to me," one of the younger civilians observed philosophically, "the colonel must have been crossed in love by that mild Hindoo. He seems to harbour some mysterious grudge against him. The other day, when a telegram in the *Northern Whig* announced in big letters, 'Earthquake in America. Death of Mr. Ivan Royle and Dr. Mohammad Ali,' the colonel was quite chirpy for a couple of evenings over the mild Hindoo's supposed disappearance. He stood us a bottle of champagne at dinner on the strength of it. And, when a day or two later the earth opened and—hi, presto!—like a scene in the pantomime, threw them both up again, the colonel looked as if he'd just trumped his partner's best, or taken miss without a decent card in it. He said some fellows required a confounded lot of killing, and Baboos never died except to spite you when you happened playfully to dig them in the ribs for a dereliction of duty. Depend upon it, the colonel has some reason of his own for cherishing envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness against the benevolent Mussulman."

"Perhaps," the major suggested, with a long puff at the big cigar "Mayne may have lost at cards to the Baboo."

The colonel threw away his stump angrily. Some jests make quite too close a shave of the truth. "You fellows are devilish hard on me this afternoon," he said poevishly. "Royle's a cousin of mine—I've known him from a child—and I'm naturally interested to find out whether he's been wrecked or not. And as to the Baboo, I've always said he was as decent a fellow for a born nigger as I ever came across. Poole, will you kindly touch the bell for me. Any of you men care to go halves in a split soda?"

As he spoke, the club servant brought in a telegram and handed it

with an obsequious inclination to the colonel. Arthur Mayne took it carelessly from the salver, and broke open the envelope. He whistled as he read it. "Whew," he said. "It's from my sister, Poole. 'Ivan Royle and Mohammad Ali were passengers on board the *City of Savannah*. Go down at once to the wreck and look for them. Telegraph earliest news at once. SEETA.' My sister's a oner for the imperative mood, isn't she? but I suppose I must do as my commanding officer bids me, for I also am a man under authority. Look here, Poole, I must get leave for this. We can't allow these two poor fellows to go down to the bottom of the deep blue sea without so much as holding out a hand to save them."

Drowning men clutch at straws. Colonel Mayne was clutching at a straw now. When the cable flashed over news of Mohammad Ali's supposed death in the earthquake at Eagle City, he thought to himself with a sudden burst of delight, "Thank heaven, the debt between us is a debt of honour. That amiable Baboo said himself, 'repayable whenever you find it convenient.' A most excellent Baboo, I must admit. And he promised me his father should know nothing about it—exceedingly gentlemanly of him to keep it quiet from his father—in case of accident. It's very timely, too, his popping off in this sudden way—devilish timely, I call it, poor fellow. Of course, I shall pay back the old boy at Saharanpur, or Moozuffernugger, or wherever he lives, as soon as possible. I shall pay him in the end every blessed rupee of it. I shall pay him when I make my haul on that moral for the Cambridgeshire that Poole told me about. But for the present, I needn't bother any more about the matter. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. That cheque Seeta sent me the other morning—good girl, Seeta—I suppose it's the produce of 'Winifred's Doom'—though I hate the story—will do to meet those bills of Watkins and Moulton's; and the Sayyid can whistle for his money indefinitely. It does a money-lender good to whistle; he makes the more out of us in the end, old devil!" But when the later telegram arrived three days after, with the crushing news that Mohammad Ali wasn't dead at all, but alive and well, and on his way back again hurriedly to England, Arthur Mayne experienced on the spot a most disagreeable sensation of surprise and annoyance, the meanness and sordid selfishness of which he himself fully appreciated. The Indian had done him a great service; and in return, Colonel Mayne, who held himself, of course, by right of birth, infinitely superior to the chocolate-coloured Baboo fellow, hugged the news of his death as a personal gain, and was cordially disgusted at his inopportune revival as a personal inconvenience. Dead men do wrong ever to return again. The living are always apt to find themselves an awkward encumbrance.

And now the pendulum had swung round once more. There was a chance that Mohammad Ali had been really drowned. If so, that modest little loan of the Sayyid's might hang over in future for an indefinite period. But if not, then Seeta, instead of presenting her cheques indirectly through her brother, might, perhaps, take it into her flighty head to hand them over to Ali in person. Women are

always so unreasonably suspicious. Colonel Mayne had learnt by this time to look upon his sister as a bank where you were allowed to overdraw at pleasure ; and he resented the diversion of any of his own prospective private funds into the pockets of a mere outside creditor like Mohammad Ali. Seeta's business was to work and earn ; Arthur Mayne, that consummate gentleman, with magnanimous generosity, undertook to save her the bother and worry of looking about for a safe investment.

However, if Seeta said "Go," he knew he must go—it was so important to conciliate Seeta. The power of the purse has brought kings to their knees. So before evening, Arthur Mayne, who was not a king, but merely a most impecunious colonel of a marching regiment, had secured a few days' leave "on urgent private business," had chartered a yacht then and there lying idle for hire in the lough, and was off with a friend on the lopping sea round to Buncrana.

As they neared the village at the foot of its fiord, they found two small fishing boats engaged in hunting about among the refuse for bodies from the wreck. On one of them Arthur Mayne recognized at once a stalwart English figure of manly build. It was Ivan Royle, busy still on his hopeless search for poor Ali's body. He had sent his scouts along the base of the cliffs for miles in open boats, thinking that the sea, in its wash down the lough, might have yielded up its dead to the land by this time ; but no tidings of Ali could be heard anywhere. Ivan was worn out with toil and sorrow, and he readily accepted Arthur Mayne's invitation to transfer himself to the yacht, and cruise about over the scene of the wreck to continue his hunt for his friend's body. Arthur was interested in the search too, with a squalid interest which he hardly confessed, even to himself in his own bosom.

When they reached the point of Malin Head again, they found the divers hard at work on the scene of the wreck, bringing up mail bags soaked with brine, and searching for corpses among the ooze of the bottom. The captain of the *Savannah* was with them, too, suprintending operations and directing the divers to the most important and likely parts of the sunken steamer. Happily, the sea continued moderately calm, and seas run off the coast of Donegal, so that the work of recovery was never for a moment interrupted. Ivan and his companion moored their yacht in the shallowest water anywhere about, and waited with sickening and morbid expectation for the final result of the diving and dredging.

All the firemen in the capsized *Star* had been drowned at once, as well as one or two steerage passengers who had flung themselves over madly into the sea in the first wild panic and bustle of the collision. The brig, too, heavily laden as she was with coal, had sunk on the spot with all hands, so that several bodies were slowly recovered, one by one, about the scene of the disaster. Dredging for corpses is a sickening sight. Death never comes in an uglier guise than on the sea bottom. Besides, most of them were thickly grimed and black with coal, which made it all the easier to mistake them at first sight for the body of a black man. As each swollen and waterlogged corpse, a hideous burden, was raised

to the surface, after long groping for hours together, Ivan Royle and Arthur Mayne scanned its face anxiously—Ivan praying in his soul that it might not be Ali's, for he still cherished a wild hope that the Indian by some strange miracle might have swum ashore; and Arthur Mayne, less consciously to himself, praying in his soul it might be his noble and generous creditor, and that he might thus be saved the unpleasant necessity for immediate repayment of the borrowed money. But body after body was recovered in vain, so far as those two eager watchers were concerned. They had as yet no clue to Ali's fate; and in spite of the captain's solemn asseveration that he had seen the Indian actually sinking in the eddying sea, Ivan continued in his mad hope, and Arthur Mayne in his craven fear of another unnatural and ghastly disappointment.

At last, after a three days' hunt, a twelfth body was recovered from the wreck. The divers had found it under the hole in the side where the *City of Savannah* was stove in by the collision. It had evidently rolled there of its own weight as the steamer heeled over from side to side, with the swirl of sinking. The captain, glancing at it with his keen eye, recognized the body as they raised it to the level. It was frightfully battered on the face and head with repeated wounds of some blunt instrument. The throat and neck, reduced to a jelly by the blows of the belaying-pins, had been eaten away in part by the nameless carrion-feeders of the sea-bottom; but even so its livid features and ghastly marks were quite recognizable. "That's one of the two that lay on deck," the captain said, "as I saw her sink. Dr. Ali was standing with his arms folded on his breast right above them."

Ivan groaned. "Then the place to look for Doctor Ali's body," he cried to the divers, "is just beside the spot where you found this one. Fifty pounds to the man who brings it up to me."

Arthur Mayne was afraid to add that he, for his part, would gladly have made it up to a hundred. Such miracles of baseness are men sometimes.

The divers went to work harder than ever at this, but hour after hour passed in vain, and they seemed no nearer a clue than ever. That evening, about four o'clock, a sharp breeze sprang up from the west; and, fearing to beat about on the weather side of Malin Head in an Atlantic gale, Ivan and his cousin put their helm down the lough, and dropped anchor just off Greencastle.

Here, a report that the body of a black man from the wreck had been taken to Derry harbour, sent them in hot haste to Londonderry, but on enquiry they found that it was the body of another of the firemen of the lost steamer—a black man, but not Ali.

"We must go back to Greencastle and join the yacht," Ivan said wearily. "I can't rest till, dead or alive, I've seen Ali."

It was growing quite dark now. Arthur Mayne touched him lightly on the shoulder. "My dear fellow," he said with genuine good-nature, "you're just worn out, and you mustn't dream of going any further to-night. There's a capital hotel close here in Derry. Let me take you round there and put you into rooms; then you shall come and dine

with me at the club, and to-morrow, after a good night's rest, we can set out again to look for the body of your poor black fellow."

Ivan was too wearied to make any demur. They drove back in silence, side by side, to the hotel. Ivan's heart was full to bursting. This awful suspense was far more trying to him than the worst reality could ever have been.

CHAPTER LL

IN the hall of the hotel, a tall stranger, with a round hat, clad in an ill-fitting suit of ready-made clothes, was standing with his back turned toward them, in close conversation with the clerk at the office. "No, surr, he's not come in," the clerk was remarking carelessly. "The pe-aper reports he was landed all safe; but he's cruising about wid a yacht in the neighbourhood of the accident. They say he's looking for a friend he's lost. But niver a friend he'll find on the coast of Donegal. However, I'll take a note of yer name, in case Mr. Royle should happen to call an' ask for ye. Your name is——?"

The tall stranger answered in a breath, "Dr. Mohammad Ali."

Ivan rushed up to him with a heart beating five hundred to the minute. "Ali, Ali," he cried, clapping his hand eagerly on the speaker's arm. "Is it you? Are you saved, then?"

The Indian turned round and grasped his hand with friendly warmth. It was indeed Ali! "Unfortunately, yes," he said, with a subdued light gleaming in his big black eyes. "Kismet, kismet. It's not my fault. Fate so willed it. I assure you, I did the very best I could to get myself drowned in an unobtrusive way, without actually flinging myself off like a stone into the ocean. But just as the water was rising comfortably around us, and there was every chance on earth of my being put out of the road without unnecessary trouble or inconvenience to any one anywhere, a meddlesome little steam tug came prying past at the critical moment and took me off—took me off as I stood on deck at the last gasp, with the sea just surging and seething like mad around me. It was most inopportune. I did think I was really going that time. I've been near enough death on occasion, as you know, but never so near as I was that night on the wreck of the *Savannah*."

"Oh, Ali, but how did you come here?" Ivan asked, wringing his hand hard still, in the fervour of his excitement. "We've been hunting for you up and down these three days through all the coasts and loughs of Donegal."

"Oh, my too friendly steam-tug belonged to the port of Dublin," Ali answered, smiling—for every man likes to know that he's missed; "and we paddled round in a leisurely way, wasting no coals on the road in riotous steaming. As soon as I was safely landed at North Quay, I began making inquiries about you from all parties, and hearing

nothing, I telegraphed to Colonel Mayne here at the club in Derry. Colonel, you never took any notice of my telegrams."

Arthur Mayne, in a very sheepish and shamefaced way, thus brought face to face with the man whose death he had been secretly desiring, explained briefly that he had been away in a yacht cruising with Ivan, on the look-out for survivors of the *City of Savannah*. "We only came up here this evening," he added lightly, "to see your corpse; we've been agreeably surprised to find it looking so fresh and lively."

"Thank you," Ali answered, with a faintly sarcastic intonation of voice. He saw too deep into Arthur Mayne's inmost feelings. "Ivan, you look terribly worn and fagged. You're run down, I see. You've been hunting too much for such a worthless find as I am."

"Well, now," Colonel Mayne said, with a gallant attempt to be genial and pleasant under adverse circumstances, "you two fellows'll come round and dine at the club to-night with me. You'll be glad of a meal on dry land. Doctor Ali, all our men are simply dying to meet you. Your name has been in everybody's mouth for the last three weeks. You'll find yourself quite the lion of the situation. It isn't every day that we get sight of a man who has been twice dead and twice resurrected."

"You're very kind," Ali answered, with the same cold and haughty reserve as before; "but Ivan and I are both tired. We're old chums. We've gone through a great deal now and before together. We'd rather spend the evening alone, I think, and talk it all out by ourselves *in camera*. Am I right, Ivan?" His friend nodded. "Thanks, Colonel Mayne. We'll stop here, if you'll allow us, and discuss things together more at our leisure."

"When did you get here?" Ivan asked, glancing over him critically from head to foot.

Ali laughed. His appearance was indeed a trifle comical. His garb had concealed his figure at first sight from Ivan. He was dressed in a Dublin tailor's ready-made suit, some sizes too loose for him, for he was tall and thin, and the ready-made tailor, catering for all chances, prefers to combine stature with stoutness, as meeting the largest possible average of cases. "Just this moment," he answered. "I had only come in exactly as you caught me. I fitted myself out in this neat and commodious set of apparel at Dublin, being soaked through and torn to rags with the wreck and the rescue; and then, as I got no news from Colonel Mayne about you and your fate, I took the first train on and came straight through at a run to Londonderry. To-night we must sleep here, Ivan, to rest and refresh you a bit before we take you over. My duty is to present you looking your best, and to-morrow we must cross by Larne and Stranraer, so as to reach Polperran as early as possible."

"Polperran!" Arthur Mayne echoed in surprise. "Then you're going down to Cornwall, to where Seeta's stopping!"

Ivan and Ali both started back. They took it for granted so much themselves they were going to Cornwall that they had forgotten anybody else could doubt it.

"Yes, I'm going to Polperran," Ivan answered quietly. "Seeta has had too long a time there nursing already. Perhaps I may be able to arrange matters with Olwen so as to relieve her permanently of her duty."

Arthur Mayne whistled. A light broke in upon him. Then Ivan was in love with that pretty little Chichele woman! "So that's the way the wind blows, is it? Well, you won't come round and try the club claret, then?" he said, moving to go.

"No, thank you," Ali replied, with an inclination of his head. "This costume alone must excuse me, please. Ivan and I have much to talk about."

When they were left alone an hour later, in a private sitting-room in the comfortable hotel (there are three comfortable hotels in Ireland), Mohammad Ali, stirring his cup of coffee reflectively, said with a quiet sigh to Ivan, "Well, for your sake, my dear fellow, I'm glad I wasn't drowned. I should be sorry to cause you any needless annoyance. I see it would have made you very unhappy—blighted your pleasure at a supreme crisis. If anything on earth, indeed, could reconcile me to life, it would be the delight you showed at welcoming me back to it. But, for myself, I never felt more dissatisfied in my whole existence than when that obtrusive fellow with his inquisitive steam-tug came up and rescued me at the very wrong moment. He meant well, of course, but I could hardly be civil to him. There, I'd settled everything nicely in my own mind. If I'd had the arrangement of the whole thing personally, I couldn't have managed it more comfortably or respectably. Mrs. Grundy herself could have found nothing to cavil at. At the exact moment when I'd fulfilled my sole function in life with dignity and success, I should have made a most becoming and dramatic exit, and relieved everybody else of the burden of my presence. Whereas now——" and he drew a long breath involuntarily. The prospect was certainly far from a cheerful one.

"Whereas now, what?" Ivan asked, leaning over towards him with a half-anxious face.

Ali hesitated. "After I go back to India——," he began quietly.

"Go back to India!" Ivan interposed in an excited tone. "Go back to India! Why, Ali, dear Ali, what on earth do you mean by it? Why should you even think at all of going back to India?"

Ali answered slowly and distinctly. "I shall stop in England," he said, in a very firm tone, "till I've seen this matter between you and Mrs. Chichele finally settled. I don't think there need be much delay about that. No just cause or impediment exists why these two persons should not now be joined together in holy matrimony, as your prayer-book puts it. You know your own mind, and she, in her vague half-shadowy little way, knows hers also. As soon as things are definitely arranged and completed between you, I shall return to India. After all, it is my native land. 'Lives there a man with soul so dead,' you know, and all that sort of thing. There are obvious reasons, indeed, why I should prefer to go home again. My work is finished here. I hoped to be done with life altogether only four nights ago. I didn't

succeed in my earnest prayer ; and now I see India is the best alternative."

"Why, Ali?"

Ali paused for a moment. "Because," he replied at last, with evident reluctance, and picking his phrases, "I feel it will be better so for all of us. Ivan, I am a man. After all, I'm a man. A black one, if you will, but a sort of man at bottom for all that. Now, when you and Olwen—forgive me for slipping it out ; she's always Olwen to me in my own heart—when you and she are married together, as you must be shortly, it won't be pleasant for you, I can easily conceive, that I should see too much of Olwen. I'm only a black man, I acknowledge that ; perhaps I make too much of myself for a mere black man. But still I'm a man ; I can't help feeling it ; and I believe in time you, too, would begin to feel it. It would be distasteful to you then, no doubt, that I should see too much of Olwen."

"Ali, you hurt me ! You wound my pride ! You are dearer to me than my own flesh and blood. How can you think I could be so wicked, so ungrateful ? And how can you think ——" He paused significantly.

"I don't think so," Ali answered earnestly. "I never thought a single thought in my own soul about that pure good woman that wasn't as pure and as good as she is. No, that's not it. I'm thinking of nothing so coarse or brutal or unworthy as jealousy. But be as noble and generous and brotherly as you like, it cannot be pleasant for you in the time to come to meet daily in your own house as a familiar friend and constant guest the man who has told you he loves your wife with all the force and energy of his nature. If it were, you would be more than human. Because you are a man, and I am a man, I mean to go back immediately to India. You *would* have the reason. You have wrung it from me. And now you have heard it, I hope you don't hate me."

"Ali !" Ivan cried, "if you carry out your threat, you'll wrench my heart—my heart and Olwen's. You have been to us both more than a brother. You have risked your life for us with noble unselfishness. We both trust you ; we both admire you ; I may say to-night, man and man as we are, we both love you. After all that has happened to bind us two together, you and me, I feel sure no shadow of a shade of such uneasiness as you dream would ever come between us as regards your feelings towards Olwen. I know exactly how devoted you are to her ; and I am certain that devotion could never cause me one passing pang or twinge of misconception. Ali, I've seen through and through you now. I saw through and through you those days in the desert. And I thank heaven I was able to do so. I know there's not a thought or a thrill in your inmost being that isn't as good and as true as hers are. If only she knew it, *you* are ten thousand times worthier of her than I am. Promise me, Ali, promise me, my dear, dear friend, you won't mar the accomplished happiness of my life by going away from her and me, for ever, to India !"

Ali smiled a tender smile, as a mother smiles at a child whose wish

she cannot grant. "No, no, Ivan," he said, laying his hand quietly on his friend's shoulder. "You judge me too highly. I feel I must go. I won't put your friendship and your endurance to so hard a test. I would wish no man to do so with my own, I confess, and I haven't lived so long in England without learning the meaning of your golden rule better than nine out of ten of your English Christians. Remember, you ran away from temptation yourself to America. I, too, am a man. Let me feel myself such. I will run away from the chance of misapprehension to India."

"You've made up your mind, then?"

"Quite. Irrevocably. What a Moslem says, he does, fate and weather permitting him."

"But, Ali, India will be death in life to you. All your ideas and feelings are Europeanized. I can't bear to think of you isolated there alone among so many who can never understand you or sympathize with you in any way."

"My father grows old," Ali answered evasively. "He would naturally like his son to be with him."

"But shall we ever see you?—we, to whom you have become so much? You won't go away and desert us for ever? I'm sure to Olwen, as well as to me, it would be a terrible privation. Ali, Ali, we both love you!"

"Not so great a privation as it will be to me," Ali answered bitterly. "To live away from her will be indeed a misery. But to say so is only all the more to sign my own warrant of exile. How can you ever wish me to stop here when I tell you I feel so?"

Ivan played with his wine-glass nervously. "But why India?" he cried. "At any rate, why so far as India? There are other places in the world, you know, Ali, besides India and England."

"In India," Ali answered with perfect gravity, "I'm well out of your way. I'm as good as dead. India, in short, is next door to a cemetery. Nobody ever drops in casually for a morning call from the North-West Provinces."

"Why, Ali," Ivan cried, laying his white hand persuasively on his friend's arm, "that's just what we don't want, either of us, I'm certain. If you must go, why not go somewhere within reason? Somewhere in Europe where you might sometimes run across for a visit to me and Olwen?"

"I wish to be as dead," Ali answered sincerely. "When dead men come back to life again, they are seldom welcome. A well-bred ghost avoids society. Think of me as some one you once knew. Why should I flit like a spectre round your heads? Why should I return to disturb your happiness?"

"In Italy," Ivan said, "you would find life easier for you, I'm sure, than in India. And there if you wouldn't come over often and see us, Olwen and I could at least pay visits to you whenever we wanted. There could be no fear of your coming too often. Do make it Italy, for our sakes, Ali!"

Ali bowed his head in generous acquiescence. "Italy it shall be,

then," he murmured in a very low voice. "And I shall never again return to England."

"But you won't go soon! You'll wait for winter, at least," Ivan cried eagerly.

"I'll take you to Polperran first and deliver you over safely to Mrs. Chichele, according to contract," Ali replied, with a sigh. "I promised to bring you, alive or dead, and, like a faithful servant of the parcels delivery company, I fulfil my waybill. Besides, I have to return her this pledge, too, you know," he went on after a moment, looking down regretfully at the diamond ring that still glistened brightly on his dusky finger. It would grieve him to the heart indeed to give that pledge back again to Olwen.

"Let me look at the ring," Ivan said, scanning it attentively for the twentieth time, and noting its make and size with care, for a purpose of his own. "After all, Ali, we're both of us reckoning without our hostess, when one comes to think of it. How on earth do we either of us know, in fact, that Olwen will accept me?"

The Indian looked up at him with a sudden start. "She loves you," he said. "She has always loved you. When she married Harry Chichele, she loved you best, though in her own heart even she never knew it. But I knew it. If I hadn't been absolutely certain of that, I could never have gone to the Sierras to find you. I went for *her* sake, not for yours. I shall see you two made happy together, and then, a week after, I shall go to Italy."

"So be it," Ivan said, with a sigh of regret. "Perhaps, after all, you know best, Ali."

CHAPTER LII.

THREE days after they were at Polperran.

Mohammad Ali had telegraphed on full directions to Seeta, as to their arrival and reception, in the longest telegram that had ever been received at the Polperran office. They drove up at once by themselves to the rectory. In accordance with Ali's express wishes, Olwen was seated alone in the drawing-room when Ivan arrived. She rose to meet him, with both arms outstretched, like a child who welcomes a favourite companion. But at sight of Ivan, the young girl developing again in due course in her heart, made her draw back and blush like a girl with her lover. She held out one hand to him, timidly, with maiden shyness, wondering whether she had not done wrong already to show at first sight so much pleasure at his presence.

Ivan seized it and pressed it hard. Then, being (as Ali had rightly said) a man, he waited no longer, but clasped her tight in his encircling arms, and kissed her fervently, a lover's kiss, on her full red lips and pale white forehead.

At the kiss, all the woman within her awoke once more. Her face

flushed with a vivid crimson. A whirlwind of passion swept through her bosom. Olwen Chichele was herself at once. She remembered all—all that it was to love and be loved; but nothing more. She awoke to herself, and not to the terrible remembrance of Harry.

Like a woman now, she drew back from his embrace in half-indignant surprise. "Oh, Ivan," she cried, "I never told you——" and then she hesitated.

"No, darling," Ivan said, seating her gently with his arms on the sofa behind. "You never told me; but I guessed it; I knew it! I was sure you loved me!"

Olwen drew her hand with a puzzled look across her brow and her eyes. "I can't remember, you know," she cried plaintively. "I can't piece it all together as it went, somehow. But I know you loved me here, long, long ago. I remember you painted me, Ivan, in this very garden."

"Never mind the past, darling," Ivan whispered low, holding her little white hand tight in his own big brown one. "Think only of the future. It will be brighter for us both. Olwen, you're mine, and I've come to claim you."

Olwen didn't try to withdraw her hand. He pressed it once more. Then he waited anxiously. Next instant, he felt her timidly return the pressure.

They sat there mute, in that silence that is far more expressive than words, for many minutes. At last, Olwen turned to him with her childish simplicity, and murmured in his ear, "Ivan, I think now I'm very happy."

Ivan kissed her once more, unreprieved. She thrilled at the kiss with a vague recollection.

"Ivan," she asked again softly after a pause, half hiding her head on his broad shoulder, "why did we ever part at all? Why did you go away so far to America?"

He hesitated awhile. Then he decided to risk it. "You sent me, Olwen."

The poor girl drew her hand across her eyes a second time with silent wonderment. "There's a sort of cloud," she said, "that makes me forget things. I fancy I somehow wanted to love you, and thought it was wicked—I don't know why. Ivan, Ivan, do tell me, darling? Is it wicked to love you?"

She spoke appealingly. Ivan drew her face up to his own between his hands a third time. "No, darling," he said. "It is right. It is good. As soon as you will, Olwen, we two will be married."

He said it in an agony of fear and trembling, lest that crucial word should at last bring back the past to her bewildered mind. But Olwen heard it without one passing sign of dread or recollection. "Whenever you please," she whispered, blushing bright again, "for I think, Ivan, then I shall understand better."

Half an hour later, Ivan rose to go. He thought Olwen had seen as much of him for the first day as was at all good for her. He held her

hand to say good-bye as she stood facing him. "And now, Olwen," he said, with a serious tone, "you must see Ali. You must thank Ali. Be sure you thank him with all your heart. You can never know how good and true that dear fellow has always been to us."

"Seeta told me so," Olwen answered in her sweet low voice. "Dear Ali! he helped you in the desert and he helped you in the shipwreck. I do so like him. I thought when Seeta spoke to me of it I should love to throw my arms right round him and kiss him. But I don't know how it is, Ivan; since you came here this morning I feel quite different. A something strange has come over me everywhere. I never was shy of Ali before; but I'm somehow quite shy of him now, this morning."

Ivan read her little soul aright in a moment. The woman within her had quickened again, and she felt a natural reserve now at meeting the man who through fire and flood had brought her back her lover. "Olwen," he said, speaking with all his utmost earnestness and force, "you must be very, very kind and grateful to Ali. Try to get over your feeling of shyness. Ali has done for you what no other man on earth would ever have done. No woman on earth but you deserves such devotion. Let Ali see that you fully appreciate him. Be good to him, darling, for he has been good to you and good to me in a way that asks for all our gratitude. We can never repay him. And don't forget for worlds about the ring. Remember to tell him it just as I told you."

Olwen bowed a little bow of gentle assent. "And must I see him alone?" she asked shrinkingly.

"You must see him alone," Ivan answered, with a resolute air. "He and you will have things to say to one another to-day that can never be said before any third person. Ali is our brother. Treat him like one. No white-skinned nian that ever lived deserved half as much of us as that dear kind Ali."

When Ali came in, shy and awkward as herself, a few minutes later, Olwen rose like a woman at last to meet him. She talked to him sedately, with grave and earnest kindliness, not like the simple child he had left behind when he went to America, but like the sweet and pure-souled woman he had known in old days in Harry Chichele's house in London. She thanked him with grateful tears in her eyes; thanked him with natural, heart-felt phrases that thrilled through his soul, and made him long to go down on his knees in ecstasy before her. He seized her hand and raised it with oriental courtesy to his lips. Olwen permitted him to kiss it without rebuke. The kiss sent fire vibrating down his spine and his marrow. He laid her hand down again and drew off the ring she had given him from his finger. "This is yours," he said, handing it to her with a smile. "I have worn it for your sake through many perils and dangers. But I've brought it back safe again—the ring and Ivan."

Olwen raised his dusky hand in hers and slipped it gently on again. "It is yours," she said. "We want you to keep it. Ivan wishes you to wear it always, in memory of both of us. See here," and she held

up her own small right hand timidly before him ; " Ivan bought me another in London yesterday exactly like it, because he wanted you to keep that one."

Ali lifted the rings to his lips one after the other, on his own hand and Olwen's, and kissed them both in a fervour of devotion. " I will keep it," he said, with a choked voice. " You are too good to me. I hope and pray yours may bring you happiness."

They stood comforting one another for a minute more in silence. Then Ali said, " I must go now, and send back Ivan."

He held out his hand. She took it like a sister. Then, yielding to the sudden inspiration of a moment, she held up her lips to his with sweet simplicity. Black as he was, she could not shrink from him. " I don't think," she said, " Ivan would forbid me. You've been so very, very good to us always, dear Ali !"

Ali bent down and touched them lightly and chivalrously with his own. It was the one reward of his long and faithful service. He asked for no more. He was amply repaid by that alone for all his toils and cares and hardships. But as he himself had truly said, it finally signed his warrant of exile. That touch had broken down the barrier of race between them. There was nothing possible for it now but Italy.

Meanwhile, as Ivan went out just before from his interview with Olwen, Lizbeth met him in the passage, with tears in her eyes. " *She's* in the garden," the girl said, simply. " You'd ought to see her. But don't be took aback. You'll find her changed. She's felt it dreadful. She ain't wot she used to be."

" Who ?" Ivan asked, oblivious for the moment of all but Olwen.

" Wy, 'er," the girl answered. " The tall 'un, Miss Mayne. You ought to see 'er. She's a waiting there for you. I know she wants to see yer as soon as you're through with the other."

Ivan went out with hasty steps into the garden at the back. There on the lawn he saw Seeta. But, oh, what a Seeta ! He started with surprise when his eyes first fell upon her. To those at Polperran, who had watched her constantly from day to day, the change in that beautiful imperious woman had come so slowly and continued so gradually that they scarcely recognized it. But to Ivan Royle, who had never seen her for more than two years, the difference was nothing short of appalling. She was beautiful still, indeed, and still imperious ; but it was with the calm cold beauty of more than middle-age, the imperious gait of a queen who has lost her empire. Her hair was tinged with not ungraceful white ; her carriage was prouder and firmer than of old ; her eyes were yet large and luminous as ever. But a settled melancholy brooded over her face. It was clear that Seeta Mayne had lived her life. Like a shadow, she moved now through the world of living and breathing creatures. Majestic and proud and stately as of yore, her stateliness seemed yet like a mere reminiscence of some former state. She looked a Louis Quinze marquise descended from some painted picture on the wall, not a flesh and blood being of our

actual century. Sorrow had stamped itself deep upon her face ; the beauty of a great grief was all that she had left now—a great grief borne with endurance, though not with resignation.

But what shocked Ivan Royle more than all the rest was the deep black in which she was habited from head to foot, like a widow in the first few months of her widowhood. He found Olwen dressed in a ample little black and white morning robe, with a mauve bow at her neck and some bright flowers stuck prettily in her bosom ; but Seeta was clad throughout in crape of the deepest, unrelieved by the slightest dash of color or of ornament. Her clear olive skin, somewhat paler than its wont, made her look all the graver and more saddened in aspect. Undisguised loss was the keynote of her appearance. Ivan started with surprise at the sight. Seeta smiled a wan and bitter smile, as she held out her thin and wasted hand to him. "Oh yes, I'm changed," she said, with quiet irony. "Greatly changed. I know it. I feel it. But it was hardly polite of you, Ivan, to remark it so distinctly."

"Seeta," her cousin said, taking her cold hand in his with unspoken sympathy, "I hadn't heard of this. Has anything happened? Have you—lost—any one?"

Seeta turned upon him at once with a sudden flash of her grand old manner. "Whom had I to lose?" she inquired, almost fiercely. "I've lost all. All, all long since. And you know it. Don't torture me, Ivan, by asking me any questions or offering me any condolences. You know who I am. You know for whom I drape myself so. I'm Harry Chichele's only widow. Do you think I could forget him, like that pretty little pink-and-white doll in the drawing-room? I love her Ivan ; I love her dearly—because she was *his*. As *his*, I cherish her. For twelve long months I've watched over her tenderly and cared for her like a sister. And now you've come to take her from him, I can go shortly—I can go and cry for him. Do you see these clothes? I put them on upon the day Harry Chichele died, and as long as I live I shall never put them off again. When I die, I shall ask to be buried in them. You've seen Olwen. Does she mean to marry you?"

"She does," Ivan answered, speechless before the proud cold woman's concentrated wretchedness.

Seeta Mayne clasped her white hands hard together. "She means to marry you!" she cried in an agonized voice. "And *she* was once Harry Chichele's wife! Oh, God, it's terrible! What on earth can she be made of? But it's better so. When Harry Chichele's wife has given herself away to another man, I shall know I'm indeed Harry Chichele's widow."

"Seeta," Ivan said, looking her full in the face with unfeigned compassion, "I respect your unspeakable sorrow too much to dream of offering you the empty compliment of my spoken sympathy."

Seeta took something from her bosom with reverent care. It was tied round her neck by a silken string. She handed it to Ivan, like a sacred relic, clutching the string tight in her grasp meanwhile, as if she

feared to let that precious object go one moment from her possession. It was a plain gold locket. "Look there!" she cried, opening the valves as she spoke. "That was Harry Chichele's! I took it that day off Harry Chichele's dead body before he was buried. See the portraits inside! The first is Olwen's. But the second, beneath it, and nearest his heart—I looked like that once, you remember, Ivan. I've worn that locket next my heart ever since. It has risen and fallen with each pulse of my bosom. I know he did wrong. I know I did wrong. We have had our punishment. We have suffered for it bitterly. He was untrue to Olwen—in heart, at least—and Olwen, who was his, is going to call herself another man's wife. He was true to me, and I, who am his still, now and for ever, am going to mourn for him as his widow till I die. I have had my punishment. Look at me, Ivan, and tell me if you think it has not been severe enough?"

Ivan looked at her. "No woman," he said, with solemn conviction, "ever bore a heavier."

"Thank you," Seeta answered, with a stately inclination of her grand white face. "One likes one's suffering to be at least recognized. I shall go soon, Ivan. I shall live once more by myself at Cannes. I can endure it no longer in this desecrated England."

Ivan Royle took her hand in mute regret. For shame and grief like hers there is no consolation and no hope. He could treat it only with respectful silence. Seeta never winced nor flinched for a moment. She was too proud to show her anguish by word or by tears. She let his hand drop like lead by his side, and glided with her queenly tread from the garden.

Six weeks later, Ivan and Olwen were married at a parish church away in Surrey. They did not care to have their wedding at home at Polperran. Next day, as they dined at an hotel at Boulogne, Ivan received a short note with the Paris postmark. "My dear Ivan," it said briefly, "I am here on my way through to Naples. I shall send you my address there as soon as I have one. I hope to be of use in the city of plagues among the poorer population. Love to your wife.—Yours ever affectionately,
MOHAMMAD ALI."

Olwen laid down the note with a sigh. "Darling," she said, "I love you with all my heart and soul; but there never lived a better man on earth than dear old Ali."